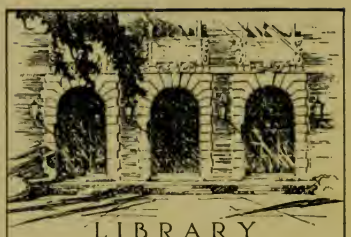

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MISTRESS HASELWODE.

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MISTRESS HASELWODE,

A TALE OF THE REFORMATION OAK.

A NOVEL IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

F. H. MOORE.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
REMINGTON AND CO., 5, ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND, W.C.

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MISTRESS HASELWODE.

CHAPTER I.

"Soft! who comes here?—My trusty spy."

"There's time to pitch both toil and net,
Before their path be homeward set."

ROKEBY.

THE sun was shedding his morning beams on Peggy's blooming spring-like face, and on her mother's plump summery cheeks, as, together, they journeyed to Windham Market. Peggy tripped along with the butter on her arm in a neat wicker basket, covered over by a clean white cloth; while Margery jogged by her side, carrying a well-filled basket of eggs,

nestling in hay. Strange to say, although Ket's men had made havoc of the yeoman's corn and sheep, they had, nevertheless, as yet spared his milch cows, and left his wife's poultry yard unrifled. Probably the cause was not far to be sought for, and, notwithstanding Goodeve's demeanour, Will Dickson had used his influence with Ket in favour of the farmer's exception from the treatment which had been accorded to all alike, whether gentle or yeoman. Margery Goodeve was looking clean and fresh as ever in her smart taffeta gown, natty hat, and linen kerchief; while a petticoat, cut off the same stuff, with a snow-white apron and partlet, became Peggy well.

The pair chatted away sociably as they trudged on, and Peggy resolved presently to tell her mother of that adventure in the dairy, which had since weighed somewhat

heavily on her conscience. So she abruptly broke in on the dame's homely talk about the poultry yard and spinning wheel, interlarded with frequent repinings at the losses they had sustained from Ket and his fellows, and unloosing from her neck the ribbon which held her keepsake, handed it to her mother for inspection, not without some trepidation.

"Mercy on us! Peggy," exclaimed Margery, as she eyed it with admiration, "where on earth didst find this? I be certain sure none but a gentle dame ever owned it. Why! 'tis mighty like the necklet Dame Starling—wife to Sir Giles of Wicklewood—wore on her bridal, which I saw when but a lass; ay, and danced, too, at the merry-making after with many a lissom gallant. Ah, me!" sighed she, "those good times be all past and gone; there's naught now

but gruesome trouble for us all. How didst come by it, dear wench?"

"Why, to tell thee proper truth, mother," replied Peggy, "'twas a gift; but you must guess who sent it."

"Nay, then, I give the riddle up," said Margery, "pr'ythee tell me, without more ado. I be all agog to hear it."

"Wilt pledge thee first not to tell father?"

"Ay, Peggy, I'll grant thee that much, so out with thy tale, and be not so contrary."

"Well, then," said Peggy, "yesterday I was i' the dairy a churning, when, lo! at the window on a sudden I saw a perkit gallant peeping in, who beckoned to me, and with many soft spoken words gave me the token, saying 'twas from one who loved me well, but could not himself come, forby he was let by a cause which I wotted not of. First, I did refuse the gift, but

afterwards bethought me 'twere a prudish thing to do, and a silly, so I took the keepsake, mother. I trow it cometh from none other than my Will. See is it not fair to look on?"

"Bless me!" replied her mother, "mefears thou hast done weakly, wench; thou shouldst have known better than to do by stealth that which thy father—ay, and thy mother, too—would forbid thee openly. How dost know some gay gallant hath not sent it? Methinks that be far more like than that Will Dickson—just a plain yokel, should ever own such a jewel—Will, forsooth!"

Although the good woman thus talked reproachfully, her daughter easily detected a gratified under-current of pride and satisfaction, which her proper words could not hide; and, in sober truth, the dame was secretly flattered by the hope that some

gentle might have seen her rosy lass, and become encharmed. Like all her sex, she well loved and could appreciate a bit of romance, therefore did not take Peggy to task with very great severity, but only gave her such lessons of obedience as she conceived her maternal duty required of her. In her heart she trusted a new love had sprung up to make her girl cool to the old.

Peggy hung her head, as her mother discoursed propriety; then, by mutual consent, both relapsed into silence, broken now and again by a "La!" and "Well I never!" from the matron, whose own life had been so singularly barren of romantic or sentimental episodes, that the more she pondered on the circumstance the more she was excited by Peggy's story. But she was fated to be more astonished still ere the day was out.

They were now walking along between a wood, which fringed the road on either side; when, perched on a stile which led through the wood to the common, where Mother Bolt's hut was, they saw a solitary man, sitting cross-legged, and beguiling the time with lively, and not unmelodious, whistling. As they came nearer, Peggy at once recognized her visitor, and whispered to her mother, "La! mother, 'tis the very messenger himself, I do declare!"

The dame favoured him with a close inspection as she came up, when the man sprang from his seat, and performed an elegant bow before them, exclaiming,—"Well met, fair damsels!—sisters, an I mistake not?—and well-favoured, too!" This he spoke to Margery, with a sly wink aside at Peggy, which she took to mean that she must not discover their acquaint-

ance—if so, it was some minutes too late, for the cat was out of the bag.

"Marry! sir," answered Mistress Goodeve, with a curtsey, "thou art i' the wrong, this be mine own wench. What! canst not tell the hen from her chick?"

"By St. Priscilla, no, dame!" said he; "I was clean deceived, ye are like as two pullets, save, maybe, thou'rt mellower and of riper charms than this maiden, who thou sayest is thy daughter. Ah!" sighed he, "happy in sooth is he who hath won her good will."

While thus flattering, he had adroitly placed himself next Peggy, and suddenly dropping his voice, whispered—"Be at the Kine croft stile against the wood at five o' the clock to-night, I have a message for thee;"—then continued aloud to the dame, "You are off a marketing, I trow, so I'll

wish you good luck, and give you good day!" With which, doffing his cap, he abruptly left them before Margery could collect herself sufficiently to make a suitable reply; but all the rest of the way to Windham, his agreeable manners, coupled with wonderment at his familiar greeting and hasty departure, formed the burthen of her talk.

When they reached the town, however, the dame saw much to make her sigh, and turn her thoughts to another channel. For, alas! there was none of the bustle as of old, and, as she went into the Market Place, she met with scarce any of her old marketing friends to gossip with. They, unlike her, had, most of them, lost both kine and poultry, and had no need to come to market, since they had neither butter, eggs, nor chickens to sell. Some few,

indeed, there were who had given into Ket, and by becoming his supporters secured an immunity. Nor were the wives of the burghers by any means busy, bustling about, bargaining, and making purchases as they were wont; and the women on this their first visit since the racket—for the farmer himself had done the marketing of late—found the place all upset and topsy-turvy. Many of the leading burghers had been treated to the same sauce as the neighbouring gentry, and their chattels had not been respected by the rioters. As Peggy and her mother took up their accustomed posts by the ancient market Cross—that Cross, which had of yore held in its shrine the holy-rood, carved by pious monkish hands, but now was hacked and hammered by the rude Reformation zealots — Mistresses Busswell and Shortreed came along, leaning on

their sticks, and, spying out their acquaintances, stopped to greet them.

"Good morning to ye, Margery and Peggy; how d'ye do?" cried dame Busswell, "'Tis quite like old times to see ye both here a-marketing, though in all else sadly unlike. Ye'll scarce credit it that Midsummer's eve is a week gone yesterday, and never a sprig of fennel nor St. John's rush could ye see from one end of Windham to t'other—never a bonfire at night o' the green for the lads and lasses to foot it round—never a chance for the old folks to take their wonted peep at St. John's fire through their orpin garlands, and get the cure, poor souls, for their aching bones. Alack! alack! I know not where our other gossips be; I've not seen Mistress Philson, nor Jenny Hobday this full moon. They do tell me Ket's men have eat them clean out of house and

home. Ay, and not content with that, have took their very gowns to bedeck their sweethearts with."

"Lackaday! yes," chimed in dame Shortreed, "our serving girl, Betty Denton, who comes from against Master Hobday's, up at Silfield—as sturdy a wench as ever stepped, and as honest—told me her own mother hath housed poor Jenny for three weeks come Sunday, and she hath been fain to borrow Goody Denton's petticoat for very decency's sake, since she ran out at the back door with scarce a rag to her back, when these thieving brawlers came down and fixed them in the farmer's house. He and his shepherd-man came to blows with them but where was the use of two pair of fists against a score? Then he made choice to go along with them, forby he was promised reparation. Silly goose, I

wish he may get it! Many that go out for wool come home shorn, but he hath started bareshorn, and they who have got his wool are not the sort to give it up."

Then Mistress Goodeve told her sympathising friends how hardly she, too, had fared; and how her goodman had lost his muttons and corn.

"Welaway! gossip," said Mistress Busswell, who, it must be remembered, was the bailiff's wife—"we, too, in Windham, have had a mighty bad time of it. The bailiff saith all trade hath gone, sithen this upstart Ket's vagaries turned the heads of the churls and prentice lads, who went with him at first for a frolic; the gentlefolk and yeomen be all depressed, therefore there be none to buy, and but little to sell. I thank my stars! Dick Busswell cleared a round sum in the good old times, which he laid by against a rainy day, else I know not

of a verity whether the Bailiff of Windham's wife would not herself be in like strait."

"Hist! neighbour," broke in Mistress Tasker, who had come up while they were chatting—wife to Luke Tasker, the silversmith, of Windham, reputed a time-serving, timid, man, whose caution had, doubtless, been imparted to his better half—"hist! lest ye be heard by any spying about, and who can tell what revenge Ket may take?"

"Marry come up!" cried Dame Busswell; "What! dost thou school the bailiff's wife? I tell thee, I care not a groat who heareth me, and would as lief tell this mighty captain to his face as look at him! Afraid of Robert Ket, forsooth!" With which she tossed her head, and appeared to be in a mood to treat Mistress Tasker to a little of her mind; but that

cautious dame, evidently thinking least said was soonest mended, slipped off; so the bailiff's wife addressed herself again to her gossip.

"At least, Margery, I can give ye a morsel of dinner, with a hearty welcome, and I'll promise thee Dick Busswell will be glad to see thee and thy fresh-cheeked lass. Come, I'll take no nay, but shall expect ye both at twelve o' the clock, and will go to see after the cooking."

Margery thanked her hospitable friend, and promised to be in Sheep Street, where the bailiff lived, at the time fixed; and there she and Peggy betook themselves, when they had sold their eggs and butter.

The ground floor of the Bailiff's house was occupied by him in the exercise of his calling, but the upper story and kitchens at the back were his wife's own department. Here she reigned supreme.

In the lower part the worthy mercer kept his bales of silken goods, his linens, cloths, coarse stuffs, and whatnot, with which he supplied the fair ones all around for many a mile. He had earned a character for fair dealing much to his advantage, and allowed credit for a reasonable time, not pressing his customers for payment till obliged either to do so, or to forfeit the value of his wares, when, it must be confessed, he adopted the former in preference to the latter course of action. His goods used to be set out on tressels, temptingly, before his house; but of late he had come to the conclusion that they were safer indoors, so that there was little to attract the eye without.

As Peggy and her mother entered, Master Busswell pressed forward, and by his business-like expression, no doubt, mistook them for customers, his round

face being all puckered in dimples as he bestowed his conventional smile on them. The young prentice—being the only one who had remained with him, his fellows having cut off with Ket—looked up astonished to see customers, for business had been stagnant ever since the May-fair riot.

But Master Busswell had to suffer a disappointment: his spouse, who, being on the look-out, saw them coming down the street from her parlour window, and had run down to meet them, calling out—

"'Tis Margery Goodeve and her Peggy come to take a bit of dinner with us, Dick!"

The worthy man's face fell somewhat, but he, nevertheless, hospitably welcomed them.

"Why, lack a day! friend Dick," said Margery, "I vow I've not set eyes on thee since last Hock-day, when the Downham

wenches caught thee—the Bailiff of Windham—in the lane against our kine croft, and bound thee tight. My heart ! how my goodman laughed when I told him the jest ! ha ! ha !"

"Ha ! ha !" chorussed Busswell, "and would not let me go either, Margery, till I'd emptied my pouch to the last coin for Hock money, romping husseys !"

Then they went upstairs, where the goodnatured hostess had been busying herself in setting out her table with a speckless diaper, and on it were fruit tart, honey, marmalade, and conserves, the best her house contained, in honour of her friends. The serving wench presently brought up a smoking capon, done to a turn, and garnished with rashers of bacon, while the Bailiff fetched a large jack of homebrewed.

The meal was quickly despatched, for

then a-days the maxim "quick at meals, quick at work" prevailed everywhere. Afterwards the host, who had done ample justice to his victual, and washed it down with frequent pulls at his flagon, drawing a kerchief over his face, composed himself for a nap, and the dames began their gossip, which meandered so long, and diversely, that Peggy sat on thorns lest her mother should not start in time for her to keep tryst. The naughty maiden had convinced herself that it was Will Dickson who was coming to meet her, and resolved to disobey her father's command and to see him.

At last the gossips came to an unwilling end, and Peggy with delight saw her mother rise and put on her hat, and the cloak which she usually carried on marketing-days.

After the hostess had bade them a

hearty good-bye, accompanied in each case by a kiss, the pair started on their way home.

No longer, as of old, were the stout sons of the soil to be seen trudging homewards, and their masters on strongbacked cobs trotting along, or sipping their cups on the benches outside the taverns. No longer were the country dames with empty baskets and well-lined pouches to be seen jogging contentedly along. Rather, were the pair solitary companions, where they had been used to while the way with the pleasant chat of their neighbours, out of the adjoining villages and hamlets.

Margery fell into low spirits as she noted the change and discoursed on it to Peggy, whose ears were, however, deaf, for her mind was woolgathering. Thus the walk was a tedious one to both, for the dame's chatter worried Peggy, while her silence

and inappropriate replies vexed her mother, so they were neither sorry when the big chimney stacks of their home came in sight.

Goodeve stood under the porch waiting for them, and to him Margery began to unfold her budget of news, carefully, however, refraining from all mention of the polite stranger, and the farmer listened with interest, throwing in a word now and again by way of comment.

CHAPTER II.

"And when I am king (as king I will be)."
KING HENRY VI.

A HUNDRED paces or so in the rear of the Reformation Oak was erected a large pavilion of sail canvas on poles, stayed by ropes. This was Captain Ket's tent, and there the rebel leader now sat busied in the various affairs of his host. It was luxuriously arranged, being hung round with tapestry and silk arras, wrought by the fingers of high-born dames, and filled with a heterogeneous collection of furniture and trappings, fetched out of the houses of the plundered gentlefolks. A large and stately four-post bedstead—of the kind

brought into fashion for the higher gentry by Cardinal Wolsey—curiously carved in black oak, and having heavy curtains of velvet with a quilted coverlet, stood at one end. A polished mirror of French workmanship—quite a recent vanity—hung on one side of the tent. A high-backed, oak arm-chair, stuffed in brocade, and a screen of several folds were prominent among many articles of furniture. Disposed about lay armour and equipments, mixed with rich dresses, dishes, cups, and the implements of feasting.

Nor was the leader's the only place in which these things were to be found. In every hut, and in the large chalk caves where the men were quartered, might be seen scattered incongruously the rifled belongings of the gentry. Idle fellows lolled on velvet couches, and swigged sack out of silver flagons. Here

a cittern lay broken-stringed in a corner; there a silver-gilt clock, engraved and chased with cunning devices and armorial signs.

This one had secured a gold spoon—a rare luxury—with which he ate his stew. Another, who knew not how to write, had possessed himself of a silver standish. Churls and prentices strutted about in trunk hose and cloaks, or in odd pieces of armour; while their sweethearts and wives flaunted in brocaded gowns.

The partition of the plunder was managed by the governors, and the victualling of the army—for they loved to feed well—was arranged by foraging parties, who swept the country of all live stock and poultry, which were brought into camp and there distributed. There was an incessant scene of barter between the recipients. One chaffered a doublet for a groat—another a capon

for a feathered cap, or a partlet of lawn for a silver cup, or a brooch for a musket. The camp was, moreover, crowded by purveyors from Norwich, and all the towns round about, buying sheep and cattle; for, the markets being empty, the townsfolk were compelled to come there for the bare necessaries of life. In this way Ket increased his power greatly.

The Captain was holding a talk with his brother in the tent, and his raised voice denoted that there was some bone of contention between them.

"I give thee to know that I be fully minded to be a king in name, as I've been in very deed these two months. I'd like to know who shall gainsay me, an I be so set? Marry! I promise you, that if any dare so much as lift his voice against aught I do determine, he'll earn a short shrive and a quick hanging!"

"Brother Bob," answered the other, "I hold not with you. Bethink thee, what availeth an empty name, so long as thou hast the power? Thou'rt our chosen captain, what more dost need, whose struggle thus far hath been to remedy our grievances? Risk not by thy pride to turn the jealous folk against thee. To my poor ears *Captain* Ket hath a cheerier ring than *King* Ket!"

"Tush! thou dullhead," said Ket, in a heat. "Am I not from a simple tanner become the Lord of all Norfolk and Suffolk? And hast not seen that this boy-king's men dare not face me? Wherefore, draw an omen that I can easily oust him from his seat, and take that which is within my grasp. Thinkest I'll falter on the threshold of power? Never!—go to, croaker!"

"Take thine own way, then, brother, since thou'lt hear no reason; there be but

few will yield thee other duty than lip service, that I'll go bail for!"

"Mistake me not," answered the Captain. "First shall the people—led by my chief fellows—require this thing of me; and then I will give in to their prayer ——"

The conversation was interrupted by Will Dickson, now a favoured follower, who peeped in the tent, saying—"Here be a deputation come out from Norwich city; wilt see them, noble Captain?"

"Marry, yes!" replied Ket; "bring them in, Will."

Accordingly there was introduced a small procession, headed by a venerable, grey-headed man—the worshipful Master Aldrich, Mayor of Norwich—and with him a group of aldermen and burghers, with some preachers.

"Give ye good day, my masters!" called out Ket. "What be ye come over to

the Reformation Oak for? Some grievance for our Courts, I'll warrant. Speak out, ye shall have proper justice!"

"We be come, Master Captain," said the Mayor, bowing, "sithen the noise of your people's doings be got to such a pass that no respect be paid to goods or chattels—nay, more, never a man's life is safe, who doth not peaceably yield to all unlawful demands. Your fellows' license hath outrun all bounds. Wherefore I, the Mayor of Norwich, with a choice accompanying of Aldermen, be come to bring our plaint afore thee, who hast their controul, to beg free speech with them, and to try and coax thee and them to seek a remedy for their grievances by a dutiful appeal to our right pious, and right just, King Edward, whom may God preserve!"

Ket heard the mayor to the finish, then cried, tauntingly,—

"Ha! sirrah, hast a wish to air thy voice? Marry, so do, then; none shall say Ket hath stifled free speech! See yonder tree? — mount up, and say thy say! We be all agreed that free licence shall be given to any who speaketh from the Reformation Oak, be he captain, mayor, preacher, churl, or knave. Will! bid the trumpets sound an assembly, and set the ladder for Master Mayor to mount."

The worthy justice, impelled by the best of motives, scrambled up the steps into the tree, and succeeded in gaining his perch, without serious disaster, on a sort of platform erected among the branches, which had been cut away to afford a full view of the speaker. His aldermen grouped themselves round the trunk, where Ket and his lieutenants also stood about. At the sound of the trumpets the men came running up to hear the preachment, and Master

Aldrich, clearing his throat, addressed the upturned sea of faces.

"Good people, this is a strange sight that ye see—the Mayor of Norwich city charged by his fellows to keep intact their rights from interference by gentle or churl alike, and to minister justice without let or favour—'tis, I say, a strange sight to see him coming out to speak the words of truth and justice to you, who be many of ye his citizens ; but who have, alas ! turned deaf ears to the voice of us, who be set in authority by God, and the King. As one ill deed begets another for a cloak, so have ye gone on from bad to worse till things be come to this sad plight. What shall I call ye ? How shall I reprove your doings, who have sacked the houses of honest gentlefolk—who have prisoned fair and modest dames—who have forced unwilling wedlock, 'twixt them and the lower

of your sort—who have done to death worshipful knights and squires, because, forsooth, they stood against ye in defence of their very own ? Alas ! alas ! I am sore aggrieved that ye have so demeaned our dear country. Yet, hearken—'tis not even now too late to amend. I beseech ye i'the name of holy justice, and by all the honour and respect which ye owe to our godly and pious King of the Reformation. Men of the Reformation as ye style yourselves, cease your ill doings, and scatter to your dwellings, leaving in just Edward's hands the arbitrament of your grievances—though what they be I wot not. And if ye return to honest work, I pledge me to plead for ye before the throne of your gracious King and Master."

Hums of disapproval greeted the Mayor's speech as he turned to descend from the tree, succeeded by jeers when, his mayoral

garments interfering with his agility, he was presently caught by the skirts and hung there till rescued by his friends, who one by one occupied his place and made speeches, more or less pithy, but with like effect.

When they had ended, Ket sprung into the tree and held forth.

"Fellow reformers, ye have heard with a laudable patience this master Mayor and his compeers, who would ensnare ye to give up your hard-earned gains in the very hour of triumph. Methinks they credit ye with being but brainless fools—as if ye had gone thus far and defied rage, scorned coaxings, and conquered everywhere, to yield at the bidding of a Norwich Mayor. I tell ye, Masters, Mayor, and Aldermen, —haters of reform, as well as ye maybe who have waxed gross on city privileges—that ye're mistook if ye think to sway us. Hearken, comrades, if any of ye turn tail,

still will I stay with the better plucked, and still will the Governors hear plaints in the free Court of the Oak. Here we bide till the cause hath prospered, and so long will we up-raise the banner of Reform. Speak up, friends, what say ye ?"

"Now beware of the geese when the fox doth preach," whispered Master Aldrich to his neighbour, as the people testified by shouts their approval of Ket's speech, and with hoarse cries demanded a prompt punishment for the presumptuous Mayor. Some, too, laid hands on his portly person, and others plucked the Aldermen by their gowns. Them Ket stopped, crying out,—

"Hands off, my men!—did we not pledge us to free speech? Marry! then must we be men of our word, and stablish the equal justice to be meted under the Oak. Let them begone to Norwich, and tell their sloth-

ful neighbours there, that ye uphold your Captain's deeds, and cleave to him who is the chosen keystone of this mighty structure."

The well-meaning, order-loving Mayor and his friends departed homewards with many a mournful head-shaking, and with much whispered converse at the sad pass things were come to, when all morality and honesty were so overcome by the love of greed, that such an assemblage could be held together by that common bond.

Not far away from the Reformation Oak stood a small hovel which, usually the stall of beasts, had been the lodging of Mistress Haselwode and her woman since they had been brought to Mousehold. It had been fitted up with arras to hide its rough walls, and a matting of rushes strewed on the floor. The place was dismal enough, the light being admitted only by a small

hole near the roof, which was of thatch laid on rough bearers.

A sentinel stood outside on guard, and through the camp was many another such fellow at the openings of the chalk caves, in which were stowed away other prisoners.

From the propinquity of the shed to the tree, its inmates could hear the talk there, and had plainly distinguished the sayings of Master Aldrich and his brethren, with Ket's reply.

"Gramercy! now to hear that bigblown Captain talk," exclaimed Catherine, "one might almost be persuaded he is as he seems to them, an honest fellow, who seeks but some redress for crying wrongs, and hath at heart the common weal rather than himself! Oh! Dolly, they be doleful thoughts which harrow me day and night, when I think that my true-

hearted Andrew may be like us, in the grasp of this false-tongued tyrant. I pray the Virgin he be got free."

"Alack, lady!" replied Dorothy, "'tis in sooth a sad thought for thee, and I fear we be in a bad strait. When we rode in hither, I saw master Giles, and he favoured me with a side-long grin. I dread he will be claiming me, while thou—I weep to say it—wilt be for Ket himself."

"Heaven forefend!" said her Mistress, "I be in great hope that my lord of Northampton by this is spurring to our rescue. Last night I dreamt I heard his trumpets, and you wot the old saying, 'Friday dreamt, and Saturday told, is sure to come true if ever so old.'"

With such like frail hopes the captives tried to cheer themselves, and as Ket had not plagued them with a visit yet, were hopeful that he had forgotten them.

Each day they were annoyed at the jangling of those who came to the tree to refer their disputes to Ket and his Governors, as they sat in judgement beneath, and heard each man's version of his quarrel —one accusing his companion of theft; another preferring his claim to a parcel of land about to be subdivided; and so on. In spite of the puzzling nature of the disputes, they were adjudicated, and there was no appeal from the verdict of the Governors.

Among the claimants one morning Dorothy to her dismay distinguished the voice of Giles.

"Noble Captain, and honourable Governors, I beseech ye humbly to grant some reward for good service done. 'Tis but a small thing I ask,—the freedom of a maid, now held prisoner with Mistress Haselwode, that I may keep my plighted

word, and take her to wife, who, I promise ye, pineth for me."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Ket, "a modest claim, forsooth; most love-sick of men! Nay, we cannot answer off-hand: the matter must be thought on. Marry! I wot not what especial service thou hast done to warrant so bold a demand. You've had a fair share already, I trow."

Some other then spoke up.

"Kind sirs, I pray ye hear me. This fellow Giles is the biggest thief in all the camp. He hath stole from many an one, but none can tell where the booty be hid, so cunning is he. 'Twas but last night as I lay half-asleep, I heard a step by me, and waking, saw this night-thief—this lieutenant—nimbly slip into his doublet the jewel which was parted to me when we got into Thorpe. 'Tis a rose of gold, and in the centre an eye of blood-red stone."

"Hark!" whispered Catherine, "the very medal Henry of Richmond gave my grandsire on Bosworth field."

"I sprang up and did collar him; but he wrested away and dodged me i'the camp. Sirs, I know him by his face, for the moon was full; and there's never another such in all Mousehold."

"Ha! Master Lieutenant," said Ket, "what sayest thou to this?"

Giles, taken aback, somewhat hesitated, but recovering his assurance, answered,—

"He mistaketh me for some other, else did dream, or lieth, I know not which. Marry! I'd treat him to a few inches of cold steel, saving your presence, sirs."

The man, however, persisted till, at a sign from Ket, Giles was seized and his doublet torn open, where, sure enough, the medal was found in company with other things pilfered from his comrades.

"What say ye, fellow judges," cried Ket, "shall be the meet punishment of a lieutenant, for setting such example, and proving himself a lying thief? For a common man we adjudge a stripping of his goods, and a sound flailing—but for a lieutenant, methinks, that sentence will scarce suffice."

With one accord they answered up "Death."

"So let it be then," exclaimed Ket, who found this a good chance to take revenge on Giles, and at the same time to demonstrate his even-handed justice.

"Fellow! thou shalt swing, for thou hast been proved thief and liar—Up with him to the gallows-tree! He came to the Oak to seek a reward, and hath found his desert!"

All his brag deserted the wretched man as he heard the stern sentence;

and falling on his knees he begged hard for life. But the judges proved inexorable, and Giles was promptly dragged to the gallows, where he was hoisted up, as an example of the impartial justice administered by the Court of the Oak.

CHAPTER III.

"Love rules the camp, the court, the grove,
And men below, and saints above;
For love is heaven, and heaven is love."
THE LAY OF THE LAST MINSTREL.

PEGGY GOODEVE in her warm stammel cloak, and with her yellow tresses concealed beneath a large homespun kerchief, stole out of the back door while her parents were chatting in the kitchen, and tripped fleetly down the kine croft, where the cows were contentedly grazing, towards the wood. The friendly beasts came about her, looking for the little mancets she often indulged them with, but to-night they were passed by unnoticed.

When she came nearer the stile, her heart

almost failed her, as the thought arose that her boldness was unmaidenly, and for a moment she hesitated whether or not to retrace her steps. But love spurred her on, when she conjectured what would be Will's disappointment if she failed to keep tryst. It was getting quite dusk, and there were but two hours before her parents would be going to bed ; so Peggy had not much time to waste.

On approaching the stile, to her joy she saw her sweetheart waiting, and he at once came forward to meet her.

"Well, Willie," said she timidly, "thou seest I be come," and leant towards him for the customary kiss.

"I knew thou wouldst, Peggy," whisperingly replied the man, folding her in his arms, and about to salute her ; when the girl, detecting the false voice, drew back like a startled fawn.

"Nay now, sweetling," continued he, "pr'ythee cozen me not of my kiss; who, but I, sent thee a keepsake?" and again he attempted an embrace.

"Ha' done, do," cried Peggy, indignantly, "and let me be—thy false-tongued messenger hath played me a trick; I thought to see mine own sweetheart, and thou'rt a stranger! I must be gone, sir."

"Nay, dear heart, tarry till thou hast heard me; maybe thou'lt not then wish to run away so quick. Listen—'tis Hubert de Burgh who standeth by thee. Bethink thee what he hath braved on thine account, surely thou'lt console him with a tender kiss, as some amend for the rough handling he got, and a reward for his fidelity."

Peggy trembled with fright, when she heard the noble's name, as she recalled the whole scene of the May-day riot, and his

licentious bearing towards her; then, with a shaking voice, answered—

"I beseech thee, unhand me, sir; 'tis ill-fitting one of thy grand state should stoop to cheat a rustic girl."

"Speak not so harshly, fair mistress," said De Burgh; "knowest thou not that all is fair in love? I have sworn to win thee. Marry, 'twould be a poor recompense for my trouble to deny me a kiss! Confess now, wouldst not rather be a noble's love than the bride of a clumsy soil tiller?"

For answer Peggy slipped from him, and ran off homewards, pursued by the gallant, but her petticoat and cloak hindered progress, so she was soon overtaken and forced to turn at bay.

"Oh! oh!" cried she, thoroughly scared and sobbing; "pr'ythee, let me go—you be no true knight to seek a maiden's love against her will!"

"Tillyvally! lass," replied De Burgh, "be not so perverse. Come with me, and thou shalt have a silken gown and a chain of gold, and do naught the live-long day, while I, thy true knight, lie a basking in the sunshine of thy blue eyes. Your hands, sweetling, were never made for butter-churning, nor your apple-blossom cheeks to waste their bloom in these rustic parts."

"Now, by the Virgin!" cried Peggy, whose spirit was fairly roused by his persistence, "I tell thee, I'd rather have Will Dickson far, than thee—noble as thou art—who dost persecute women, and runnest from men. Oh, would that he were here!"

"Softly, mistress, softly," answered De Burgh, swallowing his rage, "thou stabbest me right cruelly. 'Fore God, though, I'll still try and win thee to a fairer view of my poor qualities. Come—what! art still

stubborn? Then must I needs force thee to go along with me—you guess not the depth of De Burgh's love or hate by compare with thy soulless lover's"—and, folding his arms tightly round her, he attempted to coax her along.

Peggy, however, resisted him stoutly, and struck him a smart slap or two on the face, setting up a loud outcry; and had not an assistant come sharply to his aid, the gallant would hardly have prevailed over the active girl.

But at the first sound of her cries Lively sprung out of the wood, where he had been lying hid, and throwing a muffler over her face stifled her voice. Then, each one taking an arm, they pulled her over the stile, and through the wood towards Mother Bolt's.

Peggy, at first, made a determined resistance, and it was as much as the two

men could manage to get her along ; she was soon, however, tired with struggling, and went unresistingly, confused by the muffler, and hurt by the grip of her conductors.

When they got to the cottage they led her in and uncovered her head. As she recognised the ugly features of Betty Bolt, the witch, Peggy hid her face in her hands, and, sinking down on the stool, burst into a paroxysm of tears.

" Come, come, pretty Mistress," said Lively, " be not down cast. I'faith! there's many a maiden would give her very ears to stand in thy shoes. Wot ye not that Lord Hubert is a right worshipful noble, and hath the power to advance thee to great honour ?"

" Ay, that in sooth he hath," chimed in Betty, " Cheer up wench, this smart Knight is set to woo thee, surely thou'lt never

baulk him—a right proper man as he. Why! when I was a strapping young lass, dost think I'd have turned up my nose at a likely Knight? I'll warrant you not. But Betty Bolt never had such a chance, a bacon-loving churl was all she ever had a sight on. Be wise, Mistress, and harken to him kindly."

But Betty's persuasions failed to move the girl, who gave vent to a fresh storm of tears, as she pictured her parents' distress.

"Welaway! what will father and mother be a-doing now awaiting me to warm the beer, and put the after supper out? Alack! alack!" and she sobbed till her blue eyes were red, and her rosy cheeks blurred and spoilt; so that De Burgh judged it best for the present to leave her in the hag's care, who, loudly croaking that she would be in a better frame of mind by the morrow,

led her off into the back chamber, and tried her arts to soothe the distracted girl. The comfortless appearance of the sleeping-room was but little calculated to restore her spirits, for a straw pallet with a covering of dog's wayne, such as was usual among the peasantry, looked, with its surroundings, repulsive enough in the eyes of the poor girl.

When they were gone, De Burgh and his henchman made carouse in the kitchen.

"Marry! Will," said the noble, "our venture hath prospered bravely, so far. 'Twas well conceived and doth credit to thy wit. Yet did I scarce expect to find the girl so obstinate."

"She'll come round, sir," replied Lively. "No wench could long withstand thy comely self, nor resist thy gentle speech. Methinks the job was not ill done; and, while Ket lords it in these parts, there's

but little fear we be found out. But if luck go against us, and the yeoman should chance to track us out, and interpose 'twixt a noble and his chosen love—why then, gadzooks! he must pay for his rashness."

"Nay," said De Burgh, "I would no violence or hurt done to the girl's sire; for I profess she's a right proper wench; and, despite myself, I admire the sterling strength with which she sticketh to her old love. No, Will, I'll do her and her's no hurt, but try to coax her round, she's worth the winning."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Will, that will you, noble sir, I'll warrant; unless by chance impatience get the upper-hand, and then your good resolves will vanish into air."

The pair then proceeded to make themselves comfortable over mulled ale and toasted sippets, and afterwards betook themselves to cards—a pack of which Lively pro-

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duced from his pocket. They were eagerly intent on the game of Trump, when a sudden knock at the door disturbed their equanimity. Both stopped play disconcerted, but Lively quickly recovered his wit, and going to the door called out fiercely—

"By the bones of St. Thomas! who knocketh at this hour?"

"But a poor minstrel," answered a voice from without; "to beg a crust of ravelled bread, and a draught of water of your charity."

As such a thing as refusing hospitality to a minstrel was in those days unheard of, there was no help for them, and Will, putting a good face on it, threw open the door to admit the troller.

So complete was the disguise of long locks, unshaven face, and ragged clothes, that neither recognised their quondam

friend, Flowerdew; and he, amazed to see the noble and his follower in such a place, resolved to keep up the joke.

"Well, sir minstrel," said De Burgh, "whence dost hail? and what's the news? Come, tell us the gossip, we are out of it all in these wild parts."

"Bad news at best, sirs," replied the troller, "this Ket be camped on Mousehold, whither he hath carried Mistress Catherine Haselwode with many another gentlewoman. Believe me, I've been afoot the livelong day 'twixt here and Dereham—the big houses be all shut up, and never a meal could I get in return for a song. So it hath been ever since he began a playing the king. Neither victual nor drink have I tasted since last night, save a handful of hedgenuts and a draught of water, wherefore a crust of bread and a morsel of bacon would be very welcome now, good sirs."

"That we can give thee," said Lively, "with a sup of this Dragon's milk, which will raise thy spirit and warm thee. There be the victuals o' the table, yonder."

The singer did not wait for a second invitation, but setting to, at once attacked the food, and swigged down the warm beer, till he was satisfied; then, seating himself in the chimney corner, looked towards the others for a chat.

They, however, had been holding a whispered conversation while he was eating, and he failed not to see that they did not care to talk, and would rather his room than his company. Every now and then the sobs of the girl, with the clack of the old woman, were heard through the door; and the minstrel began to wonder what was going on behind the scenes.

By way of diverting his notice, De Burgh called on him to tip a stave, and Flower-

dew having responded, found his good humour sadly tried; for no sooner had he ended his song, than they called for another and another, till his stock was in danger of being clean exhausted; when he judiciously pleaded fatigue, and, closing his eyes, was soon wrapped in feigned slumber.

De Burgh had no suspicion that the long-haired, hatchet-faced, singer was his old friend and host, Squire Andrew, whose affected snores quite imposed on him. When the pair judged him to be sound asleep, they began to talk about the captured girl, and soon enlightened Flowerdew as to the cause of the sobbing he heard now and again from the inner room. His honest, manly soul was wrath at the bold license of these men, who had snared the pretty May queen, and he resolved to try and thwart them.

After a while they stretched themselves

on the floor, where Lively had made a clumsy pallet of straw and cloaks. They were soon asleep, and Flowerdew, too, dozed off. He was awake betimes in the morning, and saw the old woman come out of the back room, carefully fastening the latch behind her. She went outside, and from the little window he watched her go to a faggot-pile, some distance off, to collect sticks for firing. Then De Burgh and Lively themselves went out to breathe the morning air, and get a wash. Directly they were out of hearing, Flowerdew undid the fastening of the back room door, and peeping in, saw poor Peggy, sitting on the bed, her hair dishevelled, and her eyes red with weeping.

"Hush!" said he, as she started up, "be still, and tell me quick how thou camest here?"

"Alack!" cried Peggy, "I was dragged

hither by two bad men, who lured me by pretence that 'twas Will Dickson I should meet at the stile, against father's kine croft. Maybe thou knowest farmer Goodeve ?—I be his Peggy. Then they muffled me, and atween them got me here. Oh ! good Sir, I beseech thee help me back !" and the girl clung to his arm.

Flowerdew's heart melted with pity as she continued,—

"If thou wilt but carry a message to Will Dickson, who is at Mousehold along with Ket, and say that Peggy bids him speed to Mother Bolt's, I'll be ever grateful ; and 'twill be to thine advantage, for Will's open-handed, and will not forget a good turn."

"Marry ! that will I, right willingly," answered Flowerdew ; "but listen—you must, meantime, keep this gallant in good humour, and dally with him till succour

cometh. Fear not, Will shall soon hear of your plight."

Peggy began to pour out her thanks, but Flowerdew saw the old woman returning with her sticks; so, hastily bidding her be of good cheer, he closed the door, put up the fastening, and resumed his seat.

As Betty came in, she cast eyes of disfavour on him, and gave a grunt of dissatisfaction, muttering—

"Plague take these idle sing-song vagroms, who eat other folks' victuals, and suck their ale, in return for a maudlin stave! Drat him! he's gorged all the mancet, which was left at supper, instead of the ravelled bread, which surely were good enough for a beggar!"

Being deaf, she, doubtless, thought he could not hear her grumblings; but the minstrel, in disgust, picked up his lute, and took himself off, breakfastless, while the other two were out of the way.

"I fear De Burgh is but a graceless loon," soliloquised he, as he stepped briskly along, "with a care for naught save the pampering of his lust. My very heart bleeds when I think on honest Goodeve's sorrow, and his goodnatured dame's. By the mass, 'tis a crying shame to filch a hen's sole chick! I'll disown fellowship with such an one as he hath proved him, and presently give him checkmate. 'Tis his own fault an' he come to grief. 'Fore heaven! I'll risk all and go to Mousehold; thus shall I kill two birds with one stone, for I shall be anear to Kate. If Ket catch me there, though, I shall get but a short shrive, I trow!"

And the minstrel, with his lute strung on his back, unkempt, ragged, unpolled, and unlike his trim former self, trudged sturdily on his road to the rebel camp.

CHAPTER IV.

"True hope is swift, and flies with swallow's wings,
Kings it makes gods, and meaner creatures kings."
KING RICHARD III.

FLOWERDEW, on approaching, found the camp full of uproar and excitement. All over Mousehold Ket's men were swarming like ants, and he pushed on into the throng, curious to learn the cause of the ferment. Accosting the first likely fellow he met, the minstrel asked what had fallen out.

"Much, egad!" answered the man, "hast heard never a word of the great battle? How that yesterday we fought the king's men within and about Norwich city, whither they had got in, when but a few

score of our's were quartered there, and they all drunk or asleep! Marry! we've given them a sound drubbing. You should ha' see Northampton's proud lord; he supposed, forsooth, we would scatter at the first peep of his smart troopers, who rode down on us right friskily. Lord bless you! they'd soon had enough on't, and each tried to outstrip his fellows and get first away. Some say, though, after his men were scared, he fought single-handed with half a score, but was forced to flee at last; so he'll be the carrytale of his own worsting to the young king's ears. Along with him, too, rode that foreign Captain—Malatesta, as they call him—who thought his wheelings and marchings would win the day, but when it came to hard blows turned tail with his hirelings and ran for very life. My eyes! how quick he picked up his

shanks! — for he was unhorsed.— 'Twas enough to make one cry with very laughter to see knock-knee'd Dick, the Windham tailor, cut after him; but the foreigner was too fleet of foot, and soon outpaced poor Dick.—You should ha' seen the fight 'twixt Butcher Pogson and a gay noble—they said 'twas my Lord of Sheffield. 'Twould have gone hard with Bill Pogson had not one from behind hamstrung the noble's horse, when, as he fell, Bill clove his skull, and afterward took his trappings. Belike, sir, he'll fly as high as the great Cardinal, who was reared not so far away, in Master Wolsey's stall at Ipswich. Oh! 'twas a bloody fight, I'll warrant you, and the folks at Norwich have been a bell-ringing and a firing of culverins the live-long day to honour Captain Ket. He misliketh not the fuss, and soon meaneth to

wed with the fair Mistress Haselwode, whom he keepeth captive up yonder—leastways, so the gossips say."

This was by no means palatable news to Flowerdew, who, getting rid of his loquacious companion, now that he had extracted all he wanted from him, went in search of Dickson, to redeem the promise he had made to Peggy Goodeve.

Will, however, was just then along with Ket and his brother, seated in the parlour of the chief tavern in Norwich, which bore for its sign the King's Arms, and had for its keeper one Master Simon Meeke. The hostess—a buxom body—had brought out the best cheer her house could give in honour of the victorious Captain, and her husband had humbly helped to unharness him.

The table was spread with chine of mutton and other substantial joints, with

sugar cakes, marmalade, and juncates, while flasks of bastard and rosa solis faced the solids.

Host Meeke and his better half, Abigail, held to the maxim—

> "Be it for better, or be it for worse,
> We'll follow the man who carries the purse;"

For they had rendered these offices to Northampton but the day previous, and expected from the victorious tanner some handsome profit, as they had got from the open-handed noble.

Both Ket and his lieutenant were stained with dust and blood, and the burly captain was hoarse as a crow from shouting on his men, while Will had played no light part in contributing to the day's success.

Yet all Ket's shouts, and all the spirit of his followers would have been unable to prevail against the king's men if the forces had been more evenly matched; and the

rioters won by mere power of numbers, rushing in and literally treading their foes under foot.

It must be owned that Will Dickson, who had joined Ket at the outset when smarting at the insult offered to his sweetheart by De Burgh at Windham May-fair — which indiscretion had been so artfully used as a handle against the gentry—had picked up the manners of the company he had been keeping. He was by this time thoroughly subservient to Ket, and had also learned some of his boastful style.

When the trio had done justice to Host Meeke's supper, Ket broached business.

"Brother Will, thou shalt be keeper of Norwich Castle and the prisoners—see you hold them fast, and none more so than Master Bishop; these Churchmen are slippery as eels, and I be minded to get a

round ransom for him. Ha! ha!" laughed he, "the proud lord of Humbleyard was mighty Abbot of St. Benet but the day afore yesterday, and holding his court in St. Mary-the-Less, when he sent to jail a score of my knaves, who had got into Northampton's clutch! Marry, the judge himself is now the prisoner!—And keep fast hold of my Lord Surrey and his Countess, and mind the gates be shut close a-nights, with a proper watch, lest ye be took unawares."

"Trust me, brother Bob," replied Will Ket, "for making a good jailer—tight bind tight find, say I. I'll bid ye good night, and seek my new quarters. My faith, 'tis somewhat of a rise, from Windham High Street to Norwich Castle!"

As the newly-appointed governor of the castle went out, host Meeke came in with an air of deference, and said: "An it

please your worship, the noise be without, and pray they may sing to thee 'Bevis of Southampton,' or other merry stave you may choose to command?"

"Marry, yes!" answered Ket; "bid them sing till they be hoarse for a crown apiece to drink our victory; and let some one go tell the parsons to set the bells a ringing, else they would share Master Bishop's bed."

Meeke retired with his message, softly as he had entered, and then Ket addressed himself to his lieutenant—

"Now that we be rid of listeners, I would have a quiet talk with thee, Will, for to you alone of these many, who shout my name, will I confide my secret thoughts. Harken, I be purposed to do that which shall stablish my power firm in the eyes of all. You wot the fair Mistress of Thorpe hath been wooed

this long while by me, yet in her pride of birth persists in scorning mine advance, professing, forsooth, her troth is plighted to my foe—Flowerdew—on which account I be the more set to accomplish the wedlock. Methinks I pledged me some while agone, that o' the day King Ket weddeth his Queen, you should mate with the May-queen."

"In sooth you did, sir," replied Will, "and both I and Peggy have been ready and willing ever since; but, as thou knowest, Gaffer Goodeve, obstinate as a very pig, hath set his face against me. Marry though, I'll no longer abear his airs!"

"Spoke like a man of spirit!" cried Ket. "Credit me, he'll no longer refuse thee; ere this he'll have heard tell of thy doughty deeds, and will humbly bow to my lieutenant's wish. Anyway, myself am

set he shall no longer dally with thee; wherefore, take a picked company, and go straight to Downham; 'tis your own fault if you return not with your sweetheart—by the yeoman's leave if he will, and if not despite him. We'll have a twin wedding o' the self same day, Will; and if Ket wills yea, I'd like to see the man in all Norfolk who shall dare to say nay. By daybreak you should be started, else indeed you would abide for to-morrow's feasting. What, no! Well, then, I'll no longer hinder ye. Goodnight, and good luck to you. Myself will go try mine host Meeke's bed, for I'm mighty weary."

On the morrow Will was up with the lark, and with his fellows on the road to Downham, while the camp was quiet. When he came to the farmer's house, the absence of all signs of busy toil struck

him, despite himself; and, for the first time, memories of the past began to rise in condemnation of his conduct, as he compared the present sense of desolation with the former peace and contentment which prevailed. Foreseeing, too, the yeoman's reproaches, he disliked his errand, but dare not for very shame turn back; so, leaving his men without, he lifted the latch and stepped hesitatingly into the kitchen.

Goodeve was sitting in the chimney corner, gazing moodily at the crackling logs on the hearth; while his wife with a bundle of flax at her side sat apart at her distaff, spinning household linen; and her tear-stained face told that she was in some great trouble. She looked up, drying her eyes on the corner of her apron—no longer snowy white as of old—and glanced towards her husband, whom the bare sight of Will

quite roused from his apathy. He jumped off his stool and strode towards his visitor, crying out—

"Villain! dost dare to come into my very kitchen, who hast, like a foul thief, robbed me of mine only child? Speak—where hast hidden her?—or I'll brain thee as thou standest there!"

Will, aghast at the accusation, at first stood speechless, but as the yeoman advanced on him sang out "Hands off, master! — believe me, 'tis Peggy I've come after and none other—pr'ythee no rage, but tell me straightly what hath happened."

The disbelieving father with clenched fists made as if to carry out his threat, but Margery clung to him, while Will drew back shocked at the sad spectacle of his distress. The poor man's wrath was, however, soon over, for his mind was unhinged

by anxiety, and in a piteous tone of entreaty he broke out with a sob, which shook his stalwart frame.—

"Good master lieutenant, I beseech thee give me back my wench, and I'll crave thy pardon for all hard words—ay, and you may help you freely to aught you choose of our chattels—Ah! Will, thou wast not always bad! I mind when I dandled thee o' my lap, and kissed thy baby cheeks—but now, to think thou shouldst so have dealt by me!"

"Ah!" piped Margery, "who'd ha' thought last harvest home, when you were picked to drive our wagon home with the big load of corn trimmed with posies; and Peggy sitting a-top, a-laughing and a-singing, blithe as a lark, that you'd ha' done us this ill, Will—Welaway! welaway! This is strange unlike last harvest tide—never a harvest cart, and never a Peggy—my

heart's well nigh broke!" and the good woman wept.

"Now by the great God above!" exclaimed Will, "I swear I know naught of what ye charge me with; tell me quick when Peggy went, and how? Waste not words, and I—villain as ye say I be—will search all Norfolk through, but I'll find her for ye.—Ay, and deal to death any who have played ye this false trick."

"Hear him, John!" pleaded Margery, "he speaketh fair. By our holy mother! I do trust him—his eyes look bright and clear, as when he was a boy. He'd scarce look us i' the face an he'd done this thing—Oh! look up," entreated the distressed wife.

Goodeve gazed searchingly at Dickson, and saw that in his face which at once convinced him that in this matter he was

not the guilty one. Then, with many a sigh, he told his tale:—

"'Tis now two days ago since she went, and we know not how. The mother and she had been to Windham a marketing, and were not long come back—Then Peggy went out a-doors the whiles Margery gossiped with me, and we two sat, and sat, till 'twas gone seven o' the clock, and anigh bed time, when we bethought us 'twas time the dear wench came and set the supper, as she was wont; so Margery went and called, but no answer could she get. Then I went forth, and searched round the house in every nook—ay, and in the cow-cribs, too, for methought she might ha' gone to feed the milch kine, and perchance fell asleep—but never a sight of her could I get. Ah! Will, I roamed that live-long night, heavy-hearted, all around the pastures; and stood, and peered in the

waterpit, down i' the far end of the kine-croft, but the moon showed me she was not there—and the mother followed me, a crying and dew-besprent, and we were neither to bed that night. At cockcrow I made haste to Windham, but never a one had set eyes on her there. Ah me! I be afeared she hath been spirited off by the lubber fiends, else pounced on by these unlet roving vagroms, whom this peace-breaker, Ket, doth keep in idleness on the fruit of honest men's sweat. Mayhap they be holding her in pawn, and mean to force a round sum from me to recover mine own?"

Will heard the farmer's tale with a sinking heart, and endeavoured, in his awkward way, to console him, promising at once to send his fellows out to search for the lost girl.

"And what brought you here to-day

with these armed men?" asked Goodeve, presently, struck with the strangeness of the visit.

"Why," answered Will, in confusion, "I'll make no bones about it, but tell thee straight out—'twas to coax thee to yield Peggy up to me, who am now King Ket's lieutenant."

"King Ket, forsooth!" cried Goodeve, hotly—"king fiddlestick! Who hath made the tanner king of England? Marry come up!"

"Ay, King Ket," returned Will, "and that by right of battle! Wot ye not that the King's men be beat, and their captains mainly killed, while the Lord Northampton, with a few picked knights and squires, who 'scaped i' the rout, be riding hard for London town? Oh, that I had been astride a swift nag, and the great lord had not got off without a tussle!"

"Ah!" sighed the yeoman, as he said, "'twere better far the boot had been o' the other leg, and Northampton had prevailed over ye; this gain will but breed worse luck for ye; take my word for it, the King will eftsoon have a certain vengeance. You smile—well, mark me—the day is nigh when you'll call to mind the farmer's saying! Next time ye'll have to face the pick of the king's men, and not a handful of train bands. Marry, I wonder where your unsoldierly rabble will be then! So thou cam'st with these knaves to get our Peggy? Anyway, it seemeth she was to be stole from me. Ah, well! 'needs must where the Devil drives,' wherefore I'll set a choused thief to catch a thief—to such a strait be I come! I' God's name, sir lieutenant, go, and luck be with you!"

Will went out feeling baulked of his purpose, and stood hesitating in which

direction to go, when he felt his arm plucked, and found Margery had followed him out.

"Heed not the master's wrath now, Will—he's sore put out, and heartsick—but find our dear wench and fetch her back safe, then I'll coax John round to thee. But listen, Will," continued the dame, in a whisper, "you must breathe never a word, lest he should hear and turn against me; I durs'nt let him know what I tell thee."

Then Margery told him all about the walk to Windham last market day, and the gay stranger who had fallen in with them, winding up her story persuasively—"and certain sure I am 'tis he, and none other, hath enticed her; for that very night I mischanced to burn the sprig of palm my own mother gave me at my wedding, which herself had got from beneath the ass one

Palm day, and reckoned a sure charm against ill-luck."

Will heard the anxious woman's story with patience, and said—"Trust me, dame—mother I had a'most called thee—to seek her out for thee, else shall I never hold up my head again. Farewell! keep a good heart, you'll see me along with Peggy ere many days be past, else my heart telleth me wrong."

He then turned off with his fellows, and Margery, much comforted, went back to console the farmer.

CHAPTER V.

"Fire, burn; and, cauldron, bubble,
Cool it with a baboon's blood,
Then the charm is firm and good."

MACBETH.

PEGGY GOODEVE'S spirits were marvellously cheered by her short interview with the strange minstrel; and the old woman, when she came in with breakfast, sharply noticed the change in the girl's humour, which she attributed to her own cunning management, and coaxing.

Betty stayed with her till the meal was dispatched, when she scuttled off in haste to tell her news to De Burgh, whom she found pacing up and down before the door all alone, for Lively had gone off to Wind-

ham to buy some little luxuries, which her scanty stores did not afford,—the bare living of the last few days not having been to the taste of the noble, or his companion.

"Give thee good morning, Bet," said he, as she came up, "and how fares the shy puss? Hath her weeping mood abated?"

"Ay, noble sir, that it hath," answered Betty, looking 'cute and giving her old head a wise nod—"I've but just left her perking and pluming her feathers like a ten months' pullet. Thank thy stars, thou didst fancy Bet Bolt's poor cottage for the lodging of your lady-love!—Hist!" continued she in a whisper, looking round cautiously to see that no prying eyes were about—"my philter hath done what all thy threats and cozening could not compass—Wot you, sir, I mixed with her possett of sugar and spice yestereven, a rare compound, like to which bluff Harry,

the King, got off me for Mistress Boleyn when he sickened of his lawful queen, and pined for Madam Ann's freshness. La! I mind well when he sent his messenger, Master Truslove—a right free-handed one too—marry, and so must all be, who seek for Betty Bolt's aid!" added she with a sly look—"He gave me a netted purse brimfilled with silver coins; ay, and a gold crown piece too. Then I brewed him the potion, which worked his will with speed. I heard tell that afore it young mistress favoured Master Mark Smeaton, but afterward the King had it all his own way. Bless you! sir, this love's a strange fancy, now hot, now cold. First, King Harry stood at naught to win her round, and flew i' the face of Pope and Church, sweeping from his path his old friends like flies, if they dared so much as wink an eye, or shake a head, contrariwise to his will.

But the surfeit was soon on, and a new madam ready chose, who wanted no love potion, so yielding was she. Then the axe did its work, and madam Ann's short summer of love was over. Big Harry —like to a wasp on honey—had gorged, till he was surfeited of very sweetness, and turned a-sick from the pretty face which had lured him."

So the garrulous old hag chattered for the purpose of impressing the credulous noble with her great knowledge, and experience in love affairs. Nor was her talk without effect; the fame of her philters had long been common in men's mouths, and, dyed as De Burgh was in the superstition of the times, he was a firm believer in her art, and secretly quailed at her reputed skill.

Therefore the lover decided to palm her hand as an earnest of future profits, and

pulling out a well-stored pouch, he transferred some of the chinking coins into the scraggy, outstretched, fingers. Bet's bird-like claws closed tight on the pieces, which she dropped into a capacious pocket slung round her waist beneath her petticoat. This contained a heterogeneous collection of odds and ends, being the repository of bits of food, treasured rubbish, and materials used in the decoction of her philters and doses. It might be properly termed Betty's pantry. When the coins were snugly stowed away, she turned to trot off to her household jobs, but the impatient lover stopped her.

"Nay, stay, good Betty, I pr'ythee, and tell me what be these symptoms of good humour thou hast noted in the maid."

"Why, noble sir," replied Bet, with a cunning leer, "this very morning she ate up her victual with a hearty relish, more

becoming to a strapping country wench, than her mawkish ways of yesternight; and I caught her, unbeknown, a-trying to wash the tear marks from her eyes. Then she said to me as she was a washing, 'I'm downright ashamed of these red-stained lids, good dame'—mark you, she called me *good*—then she plied me with questions, one a-top of another, till I was a'most wearied answering 'em. Said she, 'who was't sang the merry song last night?' Trust me for giving thee the credit of it, sir, rather than that ravenous ungrate of a minstrel."

"Ha! sayest so?" broke in De Burgh, "the trick was well conceived—go on—."

"Then," pursued the dame, "she asked if thou wert not that pretty knight, who got so shameful a sousing in Goody Hoggins' duck-pit, at Windham fair, on her Maying-day." This remark of the

old hag's made De Burgh wince, and colour with rage. "'Twas easy to see she had took a fancy to your worship, wherefore, sir, be advised, and when next thou goest a-courting, don your murrey velvet doublet with the breeches to match, for if I know aught of women, that am one myself of over three score years, these gay clothings pass not unnoted by their sharp eyes. La, me! a man looketh to a fair face or winsome ways, but a wench yieldeth her love to a smart person. Methinks, sir, that the gallant's part will well befit thee."

Thus she plied the young noble with an artfully veneered report of Peggy's talk, putting on the girl's simple words a gloss of her own, and introducing others where fancy suggested, spinning out her yarn the longer as she saw how eagerly he swallowed her tale.

De Burgh inwardly resolved to be guided by her, and enquired anxiously whether he could not at once make a visit to Peggy.

She, however, told him he could not see her till the philter had taken full effect, so the love-sick knight went out to exercise his limbs on the common, pending the return of Lively from his errand, whom he met sooner than he had expected, laden with purchases.

"What! back already!" he exclaimed, "you have made good speed, i'faith! I did not expect you till three o'the clock, and 'tis now but noon. I'm glad to see thee back, man."

Lively looked up astonished to find his master in such good spirits, having left him somewhat mopish.

"Gad zooks!" answered he, "your worship's in a merry mood. Hath the fair one relented? Or, hath old Bet given thee a

potent charm? Why! I do verily believe thou hast been drinking a philter."

"Not altogether that, good Will," said De Burgh, "yet I will allow the old dame hath spirited me mightily. Hark ye! last night she mixed a Boleyn potion in the maiden's possett—thou knowest its effect is magic on reluctant beauty—and this very morning she telleth me sweet Peggy was softening towards me."

"Eh? my lord," answered Will, "a Boleyn draught! Marry, that soundeth none so pleasant in my ears! I well remember how a Boleyn draught once worked a surfeit of love. I'd rather a steady fire; these quick flames do burn them out by sheer fury."

"Pshaw! you old croaker," said the other, "the fire of thy nature hath been long since burnt out by its steady glow, I'll warrant, so thou presumest to guage

me by thine own standard—'tis a rash conclusion, friend. But come, let me peep at the contents of thy bundle; a pretty burden 'tis, in sooth!"

So they went inside, and Will, nothing loth, laid down his package, and began to display his bargains.

"First," quoth he, with a smack of the lips, "I've a flask of red Burgundy, and one of sack, which Master Timmins swore is sound liquor, and with a new-laid egg or two will make good muscardine, tasteful to the palate. And here a rich creamy cheese, with new-baked mancets. Pah! I got a downright vomit from munching old Bet's skim dick and ravelled bread. Then, here's a condiment pot of spice and pepper, with just a clove or two to flavour; 'twill give a relish to the stews, and warm the belly withal. Here's a bag of sugar-bread and confections,

which Mistress Peggy will love to suck, I trow; and here a pouncet ball of silver filigree. Egad, though! I was forced to pay through the nose for it, by old Shortreed—he professed 'twas made for a quality madam, who would ill brook it's being sold from her. And then," continued he, opening another parcel, "I've got a kirtle and gown of damask silk for thy sweetling—see; 'tis of amber, with a red rose worked in broider—a fit dress for a queen, and will suit the wench finely. 'Twas the smartest in all Windham, and I had to coax Jenny Quarterman round to get it. She said it was her show piece, but I got it for a crown."

Thus Will went on with his list, giving to each the whole story of the buying, which made the business somewhat tedious to the yawning De Burgh, whose atten-

tion was moreover diverted by old Bet's proceedings, as with her back to them she was busied brewing some liquor in a vessel over the fire.

She stood stirring it with a wooden spoon, and muttering the while to herself with the firelight playing on her sparse locks and, bony, wrinkled face, so absorbed in her work, that she took no notice of the listener, who heard her mumble, chuckling,—

"Ha! ha! ha! Nettle—this will warm the blood—rosemary, to give a sweet savour to the potion—honey, to soften the temper. These will light the love sparks. And now, wormwood—this will be the sting in the sweets—beeves' gall and blood to make bitter in the cup. I stir them well together till the froth riseth, then" (taking two phials), "I fill one for the maid, and one for the

man.' Ha! ha! a potent draught, as I've oftimes proved. Love for a beginning, and sorrow for a sure ending! This love is Betty's best friend, it maketh fools of all alike!"

Then turning round, she held out a phial to the sickened looker-on, saying,—

"Here's your draught, noble sir; ye must both drink a part, else will the potion lose its charm—wherefore, swallow it down, while I go to Mistress Peggy with hers," pouring the liquid into a basin of broth, as she spoke.

De Burgh viewed her stuff with shrinking disgust, and, when her back was turned, said to Will,—

"Marry now, a pleasant prospect this! Didst hear the hag? She said 'twould begin with love and end in sorrow. I'faith! I'm minded not to taste it—and yet, the

spell would then be broke. By the saints! I'll risk it." So, pulling a wry face, he lifted the bottle to his lips, and swallowed down the nauseous mess, which made him heave with disgust for some while after.

CHAPTER VI.

"Ah me! for aught that ever I could read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth."
MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

WE left the minstrel at Mousehold, occupied in securing a footing in Ket's camp.

As he wandered amongst the huts and tents, he soon saw that everywhere idleness and pleasure went hand in hand. First he came on a boisterous group playing Closh, each one in turn throwing a heavy ball of wood at four pins set up diagonally, and noisily wagering their ready coins on the throw. Then he passed a party of men and women at club-ball—a game played

after the fashion of rounders with a bat and large leather ball, blown out by air.

Others he saw lolling about half-seas-over, watching the games, but for soldierly discipline he looked in vain. Before long he made himself the centre of many song-loving, work-hating fellows, to whom he trolled out his ballads; and so well did he sing "The London Prentice Bold" that the song procured for him lodging and food with a hearty welcome for that night. Thoroughly tired with his long walk and the fatigues of the day, Flowerdew slept so soundly in the little hut which he had been invited to share by its occupants, that he did not wake up till the sun was high in the sky, when he found that his companions had gone out, and left him sole tenant.

Mindful of his promise to Peggy Goodeve, the goodnatured squire lost no time in

seeking out Dickson's quarters, which, to his disappointment he found empty; and, on enquiring of a fellow in an adjoining hut, was told that Will had gone off before light that very morning with a company, no one knew whither. Thus baulked of his good intention, he availed himself of the opportunity to question his informant as to the whereabouts of Mistress Haselwode's place of confinement. Their talk was, however, soon cut short by a loud hubbub, the cause of which was the approach of King Ket from Norwich on his way to the Oak, escorted by a long line of his supporters.

As the procession advanced, all the camp turned out to greet it. Foremost rode a lieutenant with the Reformers' banner, which he held aloft amid the cheers of the accompanying hundreds. Others followed carrying the standards captured from the

King's men in the recent fray round Norwich.

After them went Ket himself, armed cap-a-pié, and mounted on a stout grey charger, once the favourite steed of a neighbouring Knight, out of whose stables it had been purloined. Then came many companies of his men marching three abreast. As the cavalcade filed by, Flowerdew's companion, lifting his cap, sang out lustily with the rest, "God save King Ket," and noticing that his acquaintance made no sign, exclaimed, surprisedly,—

"Hallo! sir minstrel, dost neither uncap nor shout? Marry then! art thou not one of us?"

"Ay, sir, that I be," replied Flowerdew, in haste, "I was so wrapt up in mine own thoughts that I had amost forgot the cause of the racket," and, muttering to himself, "A plague take him!" called out aloud,

"Hurrah for King Ket!" and chucked up his cap in the air along with the others. Then, slipping off, he bent his steps towards Mistress Haselwode's prison. At the door of the shed stood an armed guard, which betokened the importance of the prisoner within. Gazing on the little rough hovel, he soliloquised—

"This, then, is the abode of my gentle Kate—the stately daughter of Sir Denys Haselwode lodged in a common kine crib! Of a verity the world's turned clean upside down!"

A lot of idle fellows were standing about hard by, playing nine men's morris, intent on pitching their coins into the little holes marked on the grass. Loud laughter intermingled with lewd jokes, alternated with oaths as the game fluctuated. He was at once recognised by them, and greeted with shouts of "The Minstrel! The Minstrel!

Hurrah!—Come, my merry fellow, give us a stave."

Flowerdew, only too glad of the opportunity, did not wait for a second invitation, but, touching his strings, struck up a love ditty, which he had before often sung to Catherine in happier times, and which he well knew would awaken an echo in her breast.

The gamblers ceased their game to listen to his song, and when it was finished they tossed him a few pence, which he thankfully picked up.

Within the shed Catherine was sitting depressed and sad, her heart sick with deferred hope. Nor was her waiting maid in better plight, for Dorothy's thoughts were wandering on her soldier sweetheart, in his solitary cell at Thorpe. They had heard with sinking dread of the Lord Northampton's defeat at Norwich, which

ended their chance of a speedy deliverance. The first notes of the minstrel's song acted like magic on Catherine.

"Hark!" she cried, "Hark! Dost hear, Dolly?—'Tis he — 'Tis Andrew, playing bopeep! The holy Virgin be praised, she hath heard our prayers and interceded for us. We be safe now; he'll never leave till we be free."

The poor girl, in her delight, seemed to think that Flowerdew, free and near her, would accomplish their freedom without any serious let, and she sat entranced, listening to every word of the song with clasped hands.

Then, as the voice ceased, they heard the jokes and laughter of the fellows outside, which somewhat damped Catherine's joyous mood, and made her remember what a risk her lover was running.

"Oh, Dolly!" she said, nervously, "'tis

mighty hazardous his venturing hither i'the midst of these cruel men. My heart quavereth lest he fall again in the power ot this Ket."

"Nay, sweet mistress," replied Dorothy, "pry'thee be not down-hearted, Master Andrew's wit will outmatch the cunning of Ket and his churls. I make no doubt but he's even now planning to get thee free."

While the prisoners, in a flutter, thus discussed the minstrel's safety and their hopes, the trumpets summoned the cooking parties to kindle their fires, and minstrelsy was summarily stifled, as the performer was impressed into the service, and soon employed in basting a pig, which was roasting whole before the fire.

For the rest of that day there was high revelry through the camp, and feasting, in honour of the success at Norwich. Ket

himself was puffed out with pride by the shouts of his followers, which had been started, and artfully kept up, by sundry of his satellites, who had been engaged some while instilling his desire into the minds of the simple churls, so that now the title "King Ket" was become familiar in their mouths, and slid glibly off their tongues.

In his pavilion that Leader, with some favoured guests, was feasting, and the long tresselled board groaned under the weight of the pewter, and silver, dishes and cups. A great baron of beef and a chine of pork, capons, swan, wild duck, and pea-fowl, with pasties of rabbit and venison, brimming jacks of ale, flasks of Burgundy, Rhenish, and Sack were set out for their refection. Deep were their potations, and raised their voices.

At dusk the tent was lighted by some dozen men holding cressets, in which were

put flaming pine sticks, casting a flickering, fantastic, light on the company.

Ket sat at the head of the board, in a large carved oak chair with a seat of crimson velvet. He was smartly rigged in the full costume of a man of quality (setting the sumptuary law at defiance). Altogether the dress was not unbecoming to his large style.

As he sat doing the honours of the table, the fitful light of the torches showed his features flushed with gratified pride.

Next to him was Will Ket, the new-made Governor of Norwich Castle, attired in contrast with his brother, in a suit of plain armour except the helmet, which had been cast aside.

King Ket quaffing the red wine, pledged his guests first to the common weal, then lolled back in his chair, while Master Pogson, who had been raised to a

lieutenant's rank in reward for his services at Norwich, jumped up, and, holding his tankard aloft, called on the company to drink to their jolly King Ket. All sprang to their feet, and with loud enthusiasm toasted their king, who presently required them to drink a cup to the fairest damsel in the camp.

Many a knowing wink passed among them as they honoured the toast, guessing well to whom he alluded, and the noise of joviality grew louder, and louder, with each succeeding cup.

At length Ket tired of the debauch, and, yawning, asked whether none could sing a good song.

To him, Master Hodges—one of those who had charge of the victualling department—promptly spoke up—

"May't please you, sir, there's a minstrel even now i'the camp, who trolleth as

good a song as ever I heard man. This very morning I stood and listened as he sang for his breakfast."

"Ha! sayest so, good Hodges. Marry then!" said Ket, "go, fetch him hither. Methinks a merry stave will not be a bad digester of our victual."

The officious Hodges at once went off on his errand, and came upon Flowerdew loitering near his mistress's prison.

"Hi! — come hither, minstrel!" he shouted, out of breath, "you're to come along with me forthwith, and sing afore King Ket and his blithe company—Marry now, hinder not, but step along!"

The minstrel, however, seemed disposed to linger where he was, and endeavoured to evade the invitation, first professing himself hoarse, then, when his speech refuted him, saying he was footsore and weary. But Master Hodges, all in a

twitter at his reluctance to obey Ket's orders, cried, "Thou mayest be weary, master singer, but I tell thee an thou baulkest Ket, thou'lt soon have no feeling left to grumble of. He'll serve thee as he hath done many another, and swing thee up on yonder gallows-tree, like Master Giles, who hangeth there, and he, mind you, was a lieutenant, even as I be, and not a poor strolling troller! Dally no longer—Come, come quick!"

Flowerdew, however, still hung back, but the situation had become perilous, for the lookers-on, who had congregated round them, joined in a chorus of amazement at his persistence.

At length Hodges, out of patience, took him by the arm to force him along, and then Flowerdew reflected that it would be better to go quietly, trusting to wrest away from him as they went. Accordingly

he said, "Unhand me, sir, I'll follow thee straightway."

No chance of escape was, however, afforded, for the others accompanied him to the tent, hallooing and gesticulating as they went, so he was compelled to brazen it out.

Lifting the curtain, Hodges pushed him in. There he saw King Ket, seated in the midst of his uproarious revellers, and as he gazed on him, he felt an itching to break his lute about that wine-flushed leader's head. Better judgement, fortunately, came to his aid before he committed the indiscretion, and he stood up, quietly, before his old foe, who bawled out, "Halloo! master minstrel, so thou hast come with the rest to honour our poor camp! We welcome every man that owneth our rule, wherefore fill a bumper, Hodges, and let him pledge us."

Flowerdew, taking the cup, drank to the health of King Ket, though the libation had like to have choked him. When he had swallowed the draught, Ket enquired—

"What news hast thou got to tickle our ears?—None, sayest thou?" as the minstrel shook his head, "Marry then we must be content with a song—strike up, sirrah."

Flowerdew tried to comply, but such was his agitation that his voice died away in a hoarse mumble, and Ket cried angrily,—

"By my crown, Master Hodges, thou hast found us a sweet voiced troller—his note is more like a frog's croaking than a thrush's piping. Come, fellow, clear thy gullet and tune up. We would hear some wanton warbles."

Again the minstrel tried to pitch a stave, but so disconcerted was he by the circumstances that he could scarce get out a word,

and at last Ket, in a pet, threw an empty flask at him, crying out,—

"Get along with thee, Knave! Get along, you false singer—you gaping fool—you raven in a throstle's garb. A minstrel who can neither talk nor sing, is, i'God's faith! fit for naught but to tend swine. Begone, you rogue!—yet stay; 'tis but fair he be punished for trying to chouse Ket. Take his lute off him, and turn him loose; he'll not try to cozen me again, I'll warrant!"

In obedience to their King's order, several fellows ran up and, snatching the lute, thrust the minstrel out at the tent door, though little guessing whom they were so summarily ejecting.

He, only too glad to be off, took the Dereham road, and when a mile or two from Mousehold, fell in with one of Dickson's scouts, who told him he was on the look out for yeoman Goodeve's wench, and

that his Captain was in a pretty fume, and searching all the countryside for her.

Flowerdew, burning with wrath at the accumulation of insolence he had been forced to put up with, had a struggle in his mind whether he should not wash his hands of the matter, and leave Will Dickson to his own wits, but the recollection of the promise given to poor Peggy in her distress overcame the desire for revenge on the henchman of the obnoxious Ket. Moreover, he held the good old faith, that a gentleman's word was his bond, and must be kept even at the sacrifice of private wishes. Accordingly, he promptly made his mind up to send a message to Dickson.

"Get thee back to thy master, quick, good fellow, and bid him seek his lost love at Betty Bolt's cottage on the big common 'twixt here and Windham. Haste! else the bird will be flown."

"What!" replied the fellow, "hath that old hag witch got the wench in her keeping? My eyes! 'tis a bit of luck for me, and good news for Master Dickson. I'll not tarry, there's a crown piece promised him who brings first news."

With which he started off at a run brimful of his news, and panting to get the reward.

The minstrel looked contemptuously after the fellow, as he went without a word of thanks for the information he had got.

"This then is the graceless stuff these churls be made of! Yet, i'faith! even they be princes by compare with the fellow, who dubbeth himself their King!"

CHAPTER VII.

"Then as my gift, and thine own acquisition
Worthily purchased, take my daughter."
TEMPEST.

WHETHER or not the love potions wrought any effect on Peggy, it was to them De Burgh attributed the increased passion which he felt for the damsel. When, therefore, old Bet reported that he might safely present himself, for she was clean come out of the sullens, he donned a spicy doublet of murrey velvet, and substituted a pair of rosetted shoes for his leather boots. Then he put on a cap, by the side of which sparkled a jewel, and, tapping at the door, entered on tiptoe with a profound bow.

"Good morning to thee, fair mistress," said he, "I trust thou hast fared no worse than the necessities of this wilderness have enforced. 'Tis, in sooth, but scant comfort this rough hut yieldeth. Ah! sweet one, would that I could hear thee speak the word, which should bid me lodge thee in De Burgh's home! There, all that heart could wish, or that could delight the eye, should be thine."

"I thank thee, sir," replied Peggy simply, "but the old dame hath been civil spoken, nor hath let me starve for lack of victual, wherefore I'd liever stay with her."

"Nay, be not so unkind," answered the enamoured gallant; "Why! my pretty bird, I'd give my very spurs to hear thee warble love notes in mine ears, and to sit a-nigh thee. Or I'd be content to lie a-listening at thy feet the live-long day."

"Alack! fair sir," said Peggy, "how can a caged bird sing? 'Tis freedom the sky-lark revels in, and when prisoned soon loseth its song notes. So, too, is it with all my sex; we love not to be dragged by force; rather is it our right to deny, an we approve not our suitors."

"Thou'rt wrong," replied De Burgh, "believe me, love catches of love as fire of fire. Pr'ythee, now, come with me, and see some poor trifles which my fellow hath fetched from Windham, whither he journied on thy sole account. Surely thou canst not refuse me so small a favour."

To his secret joy Peggy rose, and demurely accompanied him to the other room, where, on the table, were laid out for inspection all the fine purchases. As they came in old Betty eyed them asquint with glee, and, hugging herself with the thought that her cunning decoctions had wrought

the change, called out in her cracked, husky, voice—

"Hast come to see this smart gown piece, my pretty mistress? Look ye here," continued she, picking up the rich fabric and stroking it with her fingers, the long, uncut, nails of which grated against the silk, and made a crackling noise that set every tooth in the lover's jaws on edge.

"Loose the stuff, you old hussy," hallooed he, in a rage, "and handle the victual if thou wilt. Marry! thou givest me the creeps."

Old Bet dropped the garment, and, turning off in a tiff, bustled about other matters, grumbling to herself—

"Umph! the old tale! serve an old woman like to a worn-out boot, wear it so long as 'tis of use, and then cast it aside. He was mighty civil a while ago, and called me his good Betty. Ah, well! 'tis an un-

kid wind that bloweth no good; if his vagaries fill my pouch with solid coin, what reck I!"

Meantime, De Burgh was displaying his purchases to Peggy, who following the minstrel's advice feigned to admire, and expressed her wonderment with many a "la!" and, "well I never!"

She, however, steadily refused to accept any of the gifts, much to the noble's chagrin, who exhausted his fine speeches and persuasion in vain on the rustic lass. She was not to be tempted by finery, or coaxed by flattery.

He was thus occupied when Will Lively came in, and, doffing his cap with theatrical grace, paid his respects to Peggy. She, unaccustomed to so imposing a greeting, burst forth into a hearty fit of laughter, much to the actor's discomfiture; nor was he more reassured when his master

guffawed in chorus. But he discreetly held his peace, and in turn derived amusement by watching the amorous noble's love passes.

Emboldened by the girl's good humour, he continued urging his suit, till at last he slid his arm round her waist.

Peggy, however, at once drew back.

"Ha' done, sir, do ; you fright me. I vow now I'm sick to death of looking at these fine things, and would rather go back to my prison room."

"Sayest so, sweetheart ?" replied De Burgh, withdrawing his arm, "nay then, thy will shall be my yea. Stay a moment, here's a comfit box with sugared suck meats, pr'ythee take it. Mayhap o'the morrow thou'lt like to go abroad, and then I'll be thy true Knight, and await thy pleasure."

Peggy took the box, glad to get off so

easily, and returned to her room, the door of which was, as before, fastened after her; and then Lively's tongue began to wag.

"By cock and pye! noble sir, 'tis a marvel! Old Bet's in league with Satan's imps, I trow, to work so quick a change. Marry, the maid that talketh, yieldeth!"

"'Tis, in sooth, a very marvel, Will," answered De Burgh, "come, let us crack the flask of Burgundy, and drink the beldame's health in a bumper cup, on the strength of it."

Lively promptly agreed to this proposition, and they pledged Betty in the good wine, afterwards insisting on filling up a cup for her likewise, which she took in her tremulous hands, and, wishing them good luck, tossed off with a hearty smack.

Just as she put the tankard down, the door was unceremoniously pushed open, and in rushed Dickson with two or three

fellows. The startled pair, jumping from their seats, made to reach their swords, which lay at the other end of the room, but Dickson was too quick for them, and, grasping De Burgh by the collar of his doublet, threw him with a judicious hoist of the foot on to the floor, where he held him firmly down despite his struggles.

His fellows at the same time overpowered the lissom Lively, and, having tied his arms and legs came to the aid of their leader, helping him to serve De Burgh in the same way, while old Bet franticly railed at the top of her voice,—

"Who be ye, that break in a lone woman's cot unbidden? Thieves and rogues as ye be! A malison on ye! Be off! get ye gone, and let these gentlefolks bide in peace." With which, she advanced on them, flourishing an iron instrument, which had been heating in the fire.

Her appearance quite scared the men, who backed from her as if she had been the evil one.

"Beware!" cried one, "'tis the witch!"

"Anathema!" sang out another! "she hath the evil eye—Avaunt!"

But Dickson jeered their cowardice—"What! shall folks say of King Ket's soldiers that they were funked by the snarling of an old toothless cat! Here, see ye to this velveted softling. I'll tackle the witch. Hark ye, dame, hold that horrid screech—owl, that thou art—else we will have thee to the cucking stool."

Bet, however, in a transport of passion, at the prospect of seeing her golden goose plucked before her very eyes, yelled out—"Lying rogue! you durst not," at the same time throwing her missile at Dickson's head.

By ducking he just slipped it, when it fell against the silk-clad calf of the fallen

gallant, burning him so smartly that he sang out in pain.

Then Dickson, without more ado, laid hold of her round the waist, getting his face well clawed for his pains, and threw her on the floor; where, having bound her head up in her petticoat, he let her lie, and spit out muffled invectives.

The room was now all in disorder, the fine silk gown being tossed on the floor, and trodden under the muddy boots of the successful combatants, who were engaged prying into cupboards, and appropriating such things as their fancy prompted.

From the inner chamber Peggy had heard the racket, trembling with fright, till reassured by Dickson's voice, when she knocked at the door and called out, "Will! Will!—here I be—let me out."

"Marry! that I will in a twink, dear

wench," he replied, and, running to the door, undid the latch.

Then, clasping the agitated girl in his arms, he bestowed on her buss after buss, with the heartiest goodwill, till she gasped out in a flutter—

"Ha' done, do, Will, thou squeezest me. La!" continued she, saucily, as she caught sight of her discomfited admirer trussed hand and foot—"Why, I do declare, the gallant is down o' the floor; 'twas a sharp wrestle, I trow, ere he was bested. Alack! dearheart, he hath cut thee sadly i'the face. Pr'ythee, let me wipe away the bleeding."

"Pshaw! 'tis nothing, Peggy. Bless you! these smart popinjays be but braggarts, who boast afore the wenches and knock under to the men. He's not the sort to deal much trouble. Not he—I took him by the scruff o'the neck, and with a hoist of the foot—just so—I had him sprawling in

spite of his kicks. The others looked to his varlet, who was soon mastered. No, no; 'twas neither sword nor fist marked me, but yon old cat, who clawed and left her festering marks i' my cheek. But I'm minded of the old folks up at Downham, who be sore downspirited about thee. We'll not tarry here; go, get thy cloak."

"I'll be ready in a moment, Will," said Peggy. "Poor father and mother! me-fears they've had an unkid time of it."

"How shall we serve the witch, sir?" interrupted one of the men, "shall we not pitch her in some water pit, and rid us of her evil glare? Perchance else, she will work us some evil."

"Fy! man, wouldst harm the old dame?" said Will. "Be still, I'll have no mortal hurt done her. 'Twill be spite enough if I part her coins amongst ye. But I'll have a proper reckoning with these women-

stealers—loose their ankles, and tie them arm to arm; they shall march with us to Mousehold. Unbind the hag, and let us start."

Accordingly, old Bet, now whimpering and cowed, was released from her bonds; and the rest of them started for Downham.

De Burgh and Lively went together, in the middle of the escort, while Dickson and Peggy, with interlocked arms, walked behind; and the jealous gallant, whenever he turned his head, had his rancour roused by beholding the lovers, as they paced along lost to outer things, and alive only to their present happy state.

"Was ever such cursed luck as mine?" groaned out De Burgh. "Would to God, my sword had been to hand! I was took unawares by the bragging knave, and thrown ere I knew he was upon me; just in the nick, too, when the dame's philters were

working my success. By the Lord! 'tis maddening—Look! Will—look at the full-blooded churl a kissing and a billing her. A wanion on him!"

"Marry, and she seemeth to like it, my lord," chirped Lively.

It seemed that his master ill-relished the remark, for he answered him up sharply—"Go to! man, thy jests, like sweetmeats, have often sour sauce," and went the rest of the way in silence.

Altogether it was hard upon him thus to have his hopes dashed in the very moment of anticipated success; and that, moreover, by the hand of his old despised foe. No wonder that Hubert de Burgh's heart was bitter within him.

As they came near Downham, Margery Goodeve spied them, and jogged down the croft to give them welcome.

"La, now! Peggy, and is it really thou,

wench? The Virgin be praised, who hath heard thy mother's prayers, and sent thee back safe and sound! Come, and kiss thy fondling mother. Ah! little dost thou think, naughty hussy, how thou hast frighted me, and thy poor father, too; he's been sore troubled about thee. Will, I thank thee from my heart for fetching her. Why! where on earth was she got to?"

Dickson briefly replied to the excited dame's question, and pointed out his prisoners as the men who had stole her away.

"Well I never!" exclaimed Margery, as she recognised the stranger who had met them on the Windham road, "To think he should so have lied barefaced to me, such a soft-spoken gallant, too! My heart! I've been clean took in. Methought him a proper fine gentleman, and he was but a

vile pander—Deeds be fruits and words but leaves, I trow! Tell me, Peggy, thou hast gotten no harm from them?" whispered the anxious mother.

"Never a bit," said the girl, as she nestled her head on her mother's capacious bosom, and wept from sheer happiness. "They have done me no ill. In sooth, I promise thee the noble was purposed in honour toward me—he would ha' made me his lady."

"Never! wench, thou hast dreamt it?"

"Nay, mother, I be in sober earnest," said Peggy.

Margery's eyes were now turned with compassion on the pair, who cut so sorry a figure; and she forgave all their sins, and forgot the sorrow they had caused, as she cogitated whether it had not been wise to have kept silence anent the business, since she had been the means

of marring her wench's rare chance of becoming a quality madam.

Lively, shrewdly guessing her thoughts interrupted her ruminations.

"Pr'ythee, kind dame, for old remembrance sake be forgiving. My noble master's sin, at worst, was but the force of love. Of thy charity, do now give us a cup of ale apiece, we be downright faint with thirst; and if thou wouldst further rig him with a cast off pair of your goodman's boots, thou'lt earn his gratitude, for my lord's feet are sadly galled by his rough march. See, his velvet shoes be all in tatters."

"Lackaday! lackaday! that I will, and welcome," said the good natured woman, her heart melting when she remarked the prisoner's plight, for she began to regard him as one who might have been her son indeed, but for her own long tongue.

Accordingly, she bustled off into the

house, where Peggy had run before to greet her father, and soon returned with a patched-up pair of the yeoman's ploughing boots in one hand, and in the other a large jack of frothy ale.

De Burgh thankfully exchanged his ragged shoes for Goodeve's well-worn leather boots, and, after a pull at the ale jack, recovered his spirits.

"See, Master Lieutenant," said he jestingly to Dickson, holding out a foot, "I'll warrant these hides were cured by thy right puissant King, they have burst their skins from sheer disdain of covering but a yeoman's feet. 'Od's body! if thy King make his laws but middling as his leather, they will soon want a patching as bad as these boots."

"Thou'lt soon have good opportunity of judging," said Dickson, who had watched Margery's attention to his prisoner with

some jealousy, "I am about to march thee straight to our King, and he will accord thee fair and open trial under the Oak, so I advise thee to save thy breath till then, and waste it not in jesting now; you will want it bad enough to cry for mercy. Ay, and you too, Master Jackal, who hast pinned thyself to the sleeve of this foul-hearted noble, and dost his dirty work; you'll not be forgot, I'll warrant you."

"A right proper arbitrament, by the mass!" cried De Burgh, "In sooth, thy blooming honours have scarce improved thy manners. Marry! hadst thou a spark of pluck in thee, thou wouldst choose to try my mettle in fair combat, rather than drag me to this Oak like a sheep to the shambles. Fair Mistress"—this to Peggy, who now came up with Goodeve, with whom, after receiving an affectionate welcome, she had been the while chatting—

"wilt thou so far forgive my sin as to ask a boon for me? 'Tis but to pray this sweetheart of thine to send a bullet through my heart, and make an ending of me. He is set to drag me i'the tail of his fellows to this Oak for a mock afore Ket's men. Surely death were revenge sweet enough for him to take."

"Nay, my lord, to ask such a boon were to make me but a murderer; rather do I tell my Will that else he letteth thee go free away, he's not the man to whom Peggy Goodeve gave her troth. I'll have no blood let on account of me. Why, Will, 'twould turn all my love to hate. Come, sweetling—methinks I need not ask, 'tis surely granted ere I speak—let the worshipful noble go free with his fellow. He hath been sufficient well served out for his bad deed, which I do forgive him, so thou must needs agree. Speak, Willie, dear," pleaded the girl.

"Spoke like an honest wench and a pious," struck in Goodeve, before Dickson could reply. "Thou hadst well deserved death, sirrah, if when caught thou hadst been spitted i' the brawl—but to kill thee coldblooded—pah! the thought sickeneth me!"

"Alack! alack!" whimpered Margery. "What! kill the comely knight! Nay, Will, thou'lt never do the cruel deed," and the good-hearted soul wept copiously at the dismal prospect, hiding her eyes in the corner of her apron.

"Now by Heaven!" said Will, "I would fain yield to your pleadings, but am bound by strict oath to render up to Ket himself every man that's took, gentle or simple; and he would take the deed amiss if I let this lordling go."

"Fy now! Will, I'll free thee of thine oath," said Peggy, creeping up and giving

her lover a coaxing kiss. "Come, dear one, thou'lt not refuse me." Poor Dickson thus pressed found himself unable to withstand Peggy's pleading eyes and soft lips, so he ordered the prisoners to be unbound, saying, "I must yield to them, else will they hold me a very butcher. Get ye gone, sirs, while I be i' the mind, and learn that the poor soil tiller, as ye deem me, can forego his just revenge on a beaten foe. Make yourselves scarce; if ye ever cross my path again, ye shall rue the day—Begone!"

De Burgh essaying to speak his thanks, Will waved him off, impetuously crying out "Never a word! Never a word!"

The prisoners were not slow to avail themselves of their chance, and took themselves off with light heels and lighter hearts.

"Egad!" said Goodeve, "there's good-

by to my sulling boots. Well-a-day! I'll not begrudge the lordling so small a loan, though I never see them back, and it be like parting with old friends, for I'd got to love them from long acquaintance. Shake hands, Will, 'twas well done. Ah! would that I could urge thee one step further, to break from thy fellows, then 'twould gladden mine heart to see thee and my wench man and wife. Thou shouldst go hear the parson's homily o' Sunday on rebellion, 'twas writ by Master Cranmer, and aboundeth in sense. 'Twould teach thee that a wise man shifteth his mind, when he seeth he hath judged his ways amiss—'Tis only a fool that, swine like, is deaf to reason."

"Nay, gaffer," replied Will, "in that matter I am nowise mine own master; my word is given, which is my bond. Pr'ythee press me no further. Surely I have fairly

earned my reward, wherefore I make bold to ask you'll no longer withhold my sweetheart from me."

"Awell! awell!" said Goodeve, as Peggy threw herself on his neck, coaxingly, "I'll not thwart thee, wench; when fairer times come thou shalt wed her, Will. Methinks, however, the camp at Mousehold is scarce a fitting home for an honest maiden, wherefore wait till the racket hath abated, and there's some surety of a quiet life for her."

The delighted lover wrung Goodeve's hand, and bestowed a hearty kiss on Peggy, and another on the dame; then, promising soon to return, he went off to Mousehold with his men, whose looks betokened disapproval of his proceedings.

CHAPTER VIII.

"If former good coulde answer present yll,
And often well might mende but onse amysse,
My lief, forepaste in truthe and dutie still,
Might salve this faulte for which my troble is.
O happie theye that quyte their princes soo!
But this with me, O wretched man, it frames;
For often well I unrewarded goo,
And for oon evell receyve ten thousand blames."

OLD VERSE.

LIKE bees round their hive, the Reformation men were clustered about their Oak listening with attention, broken now and again by hums of dissent, to a divine who from the rostrum was earnestly holding forth to them. There was that about the speaker's manner which commanded respect. His mien was imposing, and he stood at ease, self-possessed, and undaunted by the fierce scowls of his audience

beneath. Nature had endowed him with a noble forehead and eyes dark and piercing, capable of reading the weaknesses and foibles of his fellows; while his trained voice and diction proved that he was well cultured. A black preacher's gown marked him an ecclesiastic of the Reformed Church.

Such was Dr. Matthew Parker, who had journied from his peaceful home in the quiet schools of Cambridge to upraise his voice in the interest of order and social morality.

The orator was about concluding his appeal, for he had been speaking well nigh an hour—"Friends, for so I will still call ye, being brother countrymen, in hope of your reform, methinks I have proved how sad a pass ye be come to. Not only be ye rebels who have scorned the proffered mercy of your gentle King, when out of the fulness of his sympathy for your ignorance

he did offer a pardon for your misdeeds, if only ye would get back to your homes, but—alas! that I should say it—since last May-day till this fair Lammas morning, ye have been strangers to all lawful rule. Your ways are those of tyrants, rogues, and robbers. Tyrants, because ye have forced by threats full many an unwilling one to herd with ye; ay, and have done to death some who withstood your pillage and oppression. Robbers, since ye have took the chattels, beeves, and muttons—ay, and the very jerkins off the backs of your orderly neighbours, whom God in his great wisdom hath set above ye. Pretty fellows, forsooth, to dub yourselves Reformers! Shall I commend your honesty? Marry! I turn mine eyes around the camp, and see dishonesty stalking abroad; one cheating another of his ill-got gains. Shall I praise

your virtue? Alas! the last spark of that faint flame hath long since gone utterly out amongst ye. Can I, then, appointed to preach God's word, approve your ways? No, forsooth, rather do I warn ye your ending will be that which ever follows the footsteps of them who tread the paths of sin. Men! ye make a very mock of holy justice, which ye profess to have stablished here. How can justice be, with the law-givers themselves law-breakers? Credit me, my masters, just Heaven will not longer abrook these guileful ways, wherefore come out of them while ye have time. Perchance though, ye think because ye have prevailed against the handful of men, whom the king sent, that ye have stablished your power. Be advised, the king's captains will overawe ye like schoolboys, when they come to reckon with ye for that day's work. Dally not, friends, make humble submission to

your lawful king, and I will cry with mine whole heart, 'God speed ye.'"

As Parker came towards the end of his sermon, the signs of dissent from his unpalatable sayings increased, but the sacred freedom of the Oak saved him from actual violence. Nevertheless, when he came down he was jeered and hooted by those on whose tender corns he had so boldly trodden. Unheeding their noisy demonstrations, he went calmly on his way to the tent of King Ket, in obedience to the peremptory command of an armed guard, in waiting for his descent.

Parker found him striding up and down the tent, his face, which shewed symptoms of free living and indulgence, flushed and heated with passion. The table was littered with empty drinking cups and wine flasks. Stopping his walk abruptly before his visitor, Ket exclaimed—

"'Od's body! Master preacher, I am clean amazed you durst thus beard me and becall us, who be bonded together but for the sake of stablishing justice and right—a curse on thy mischief-making tongue! Marry! I am strongly minded to proclaim from this day that free speech is forbid, and to swing thee from the topmost branch of the Oak for a warning to other bold-tongued blatherers—Just as the yeoman strings a magpie to a pole in his new-sown wheat-field as a scarecrow for other birds. What sayest thou for thyself?"

"What say I, Master Ket, quotha?" answered Parker.

"*Master* Ket, forsooth," interrupted Ket, "use a civil tongue, preacher, and a respectful. Remember, 'tis *King* Ket thou standest afore, and demean thyself dutifully."

"Your pardon, sir," replied Parker, "but methought Edward was King of these

realms ; I can scarce see how two Kings may hold sway over us. Thou ma'yst persuade this hallooing crowd to humour thy fancy, and call thee King or Lord, but expect not me, nor other loyal son of England, to forswear our anointed King."

"Bold preacher, dost question my title ?" said Ket. "Learn, 'twas this broad sword made it, and 'tis these united hearts, ye see around, uphold it."

"Alas ! that it be so," said Parker, "Would to God I could persuade thee to lay down these misfitting functions, and to ply again thy proper honest trade. Kingship and hide dressing are a somewhat ill-matched pair !"

"'Od's body !" cried Ket, "me hoped thy preachment was ended, and thou pumped dry of speech. I've no appetite for a second dish. Why, thou'rt like a Dutch clock, which once wound up will run

on for twelve hours without daunt. Hold thy peace for the nonce, and I'll soon find thee a job to thy mind—Thou shalt hallow us a wedding—Meanwhile we'll lodge thee here among us for a day or two. Nay," continued he as Parker was about to speak, "never another word will I stomach now—Ho! without!"

And, as at his summons men came in, he said,—

"Take this reverend preacher, and see to him that he want neither victual nor drink; but keep strict watch that he slip not off. I do mistrust him who sets up himself as more honest than his fellows," with which, he waved them out.

"The fates did surely befriend me when this chattering doctor came hither. I shall now be wedded to Mistress Kate, that the Church can not deny her own act—Check-mate to Master Flowerdew!—Marry, 'tis

like a dream so to have mounted fortune's ladder, that I be now on the topmost rung, and a King in very deed! My bridal with this lily-handed madam will crown my secret hopes, and touch the spleen of all my foes."

Thus musing, Ket left the tent and sought his reluctant lady-love. He entered the shed without ceremony, prepared to find Catherine in a puling state, but was astonished when the Mistress of Thorpe rose from her humble seat with dignified pride to confront him. In the dim light of the hovel he saw and contrasted her demeanour with that, when she was brought in a prisoner with all her spirits crushed out of her.

"Give thee good day, fair Kate," said he, "I be glad to see thee perk so. Marry, thou plumest thyself as a pea-hen doth for her mate—and lo! he is here to answer thy cluck!"

His gallantry, however, met with a sharp rebuff from Mistress Haselwode, who answered curtly, "I beseech thee to vex me no longer, sir. 'Tis not for thee I plume me; rather do I hold thee in less liking now thou playest the king, than I did afore when thou wert plain Robert Ket, of Windham. Methinks fine clothing ill suiteth thee, for thy manners betray bad breeding. Believe me, an honest jerkin of cloth would better match them, and if it covered an honest heart win thee more respect."

Ket flushed with rage as he exclaimed—

"By heaven! madam, thou hast clean run to the end of thy tether. King Ket can force thee, stubborn as thou art, and when once buckled tight will teach thee to love him—ay, and to queen it too. There awaiteth us i' the camp a godly preacher to set the seal of Holy Church on the wed-

lock, and if he turn restive, I must needs dispense with his aid, and, decreeing a new marriage law, will wed thee beneath the Oak i' the face of all the folks. Mistress Luttrell, you shall be bride's maiden for lack of a better. Pr'ythee school this proud lady to her task. We'll have a right gay bridal with heaven's vault for the church ceiling. Farewell, Mistress Haselwode, the new week shall christen thee Queen Ket!"

Saying which, he abruptly left the startled lady, and going straight to his tent, called together sundry of his lieutenants, and informed them of the approaching event, bidding them send messengers to announce it through the camp, and to make preparations for a great feasting and merry-making. They promptly hurried off to do his errand, exchanging among themselves many a sly nod and wink.

"I always knew our Ket loved a smart-built wench," whispered Joe Scroggs, once a poor ale drawer at the King's Head hostel of Norwich, to his companion Tom Grimes. "I mind well when he used to call with his leathern pack in times gone by at the King's Head. Bless you! many a cup of ale have I served him with, and few be the coins he ever tossed me—'Twixt me and you, neighbour, he was a tight-fisted fellow then-a-days. Keep close, and I'll tell thee a secret—One of our serving wenches, Jenny, took his roving fancy—as trim a lass as ever you clapt eyes on—but he soon tired of her, and cast her off. Poor Jenny! she'd better far ha' wedded the ale-drawer. Ah! I loved the maid, and would have kept true to her—Mark me, friend, 'twill be so with this new love of his."

"Hush! hush! friend Scroggs," said

Grimes timorously, "lest some one overhear and betray thee. I warrant you a clay-burnt pot can not compete with a brass without cracking; so if thy chatter be carried to Ket's ears—and many a carrytale there is amongst us—he will hang thee up for babbling of his light o' love. 'Tis best to swim with the tide, since thou canst not stem it. Be advised, hold thy peace—a still tongue makes a wise head!"

The ex-ale drawer seemed to see the force of his companion's argument, for he held his tongue and went off to his quarters to spread the news of Ket's approaching bridal, and the accompanying festivities, which rendered their King more popular than ever in the eyes of his followers.

The messengers had hardly gone out when Will Dickson returned from his love-chase, and received a loud welcome from Ket, whom he found in boisterous spirits.

"Halloo! Will, art back at last? Thou hast been gone awhile. Where's the wench? Go, fetch her in, and let her swear fealty. I'd like a look at her. Yeoman Goodeve's blue-eyed, rose-cheeked, lass and I be old friends. Thou'lt not have long to wait. You and she shall be spliced alongside Kate and me o' Monday, and by the self-same parson."

"I would such luck were in store for me, sir," replied Will, "but I must wait a space; the gaffer is not willing yet awhile to let her come."

"Eh? man, say'st thou Goodeve's not willing? Methought thou wentest a purpose to fetch her, despite him."

"That I did, sir; but second thought is sometimes best, and I changed my mind, for I found the yeoman and his gammer downhearted about the girl, who had been snared away from them. But I found

her out and brought her back safe, and then had not the heart to part them, when Goodeve begged me wait a bit."

"Now out on thee, man," exclaimed Ket, "for a poor spirited cock, who didst start with so loud a crow, and comest back with a bedraggled tail! I love not these dilly-dally ways. By cock and pye! I've been mistook in thee, who art but a blatherer, after all."

"Nay, then," replied Will, boldly, "if it come to that, thou canst not gainsay I've proved me in fair fight more of a doer than a talker. Methinks I've scarce merited a taunting in this fashion, sir."

The talk was interrupted by the entrance of two of Will's men, who, listening without, had heard Ket's loud reproach, and, like backbiting curs, now came in agape to tell their version of the affair, and how Dickson had let De Burgh off scot free.

Ket heard them with a frowning brow, and cried—"How now! I see by thy hang-down face these knaves tell a true tale of thee. A likely fellow, forsooth, for henchman of mine! Marry! since thou hast done so traitorously by me, I'll force thee to stand in the jack lord's shoes, and suffer in his stead. Ho, without!"

Then to the fellows, who came nimbly in response to his call, he said, "Take this Dickson along with ye, and put him in safe ward; I do degrade him from his office. Mark ye well, if he get away your lives shall pay forfeit. 'Od's body! I'll teach ye to flout King Ket, sir lieutenant."

Will's blood was up at his quondam patron's uncivil treatment, and, laying his hand on his sword, he attempted to draw, but was quickly overpowered and dragged off from Ket's presence. Then, amid the

jeers and sallies of those who had been used to obey him, but who received his fall with that delight which ever fills small minds at the downfall of one enjoying higher privileges than their own, he was lodged in a large barn, now serving the purpose of a jail for those who fell under the ban of the King of the Oak. Shoving their prisoner roughly in, the fellows locked the door and left him.

When his eyes had overcome the gloom of the place, he saw that it had another tenant. Seated on a boltin of straw was a grey-bearded man, who presently addressed him—

"Who art thou, sir? In truth, I be glad to see any fellow mortal, for I've had no companions save bats and rats since here I've been mewed."

"Will Dickson 's my name, sir—this

morning a lieutenant of King Ket's army, but now shorn of mine honour, and worse off than the veriest knave in the camp."

"Well now, that's a good augury!" said the other. When thieves fall out, honest men get their rights—though I mean no offence, master—so pr'ythee pardon my speech, and tell me what's astir, for I be moped with my prisonment."

"Methinks thou'rt somewhat overpert," said Will, "yet I'll not take umbrage at thy talk. What's thy name?"

"Giles Starling, of Silfield Manor—a poor knight at thy service, sir."

"Then be I in good company, at least," said Will; "and as for news, sir knight, the camp's all alive making ready for King Ket's wedding with Mistress Haselwode, of Thorpe, who is held in ward hard by."

"Now, curse him for an audacious knave!" cried Sir Giles, in a choler.

"What! doth he so high carry his crest as to presume to mate with that gentle lady?"

"In sooth, he doth," answered Will, "and carrieth all things with a high hand, too, I'll warrant you. Wouldst believe it? Mine offence is but letting free a noble, who wrought me ill—thou seest the good turn brought me but a sorry recompense."

The ice being now well broken, Sir Giles plied Will with many a question, and, in return, told anecdotes of the chase and the like, proving so agreeable a companion that Will wellnigh forgot his troubles as he listened to the talkative knight.

CHAPTER IX.

"And vows to crown himself in Westminster.
His army is a ragged multitude
Of hinds and peasants, rude and merciless."—
KING HENRY VI.

AFTER dispatching the message to Dickson, Flowerdew continued his journey in the direction of Dereham. His boots by this time were out at toes, his jerkin at elbows, and his travel-stained hose discovered many a patch and hole. His yellow hair fell long and unpolled down his shoulders, and his beard grew ragged for want of a trimming.

"I' faith!" mused he, looking ruefully down at his boots, "an't were Maunday Thursday; I'm beggar fit and willing to

sit afore King Ket, and let him wash my feet for a pair of shoes and a few pence."

Nevertheless, the minstrel was no uncomely fellow, his cheeks had recovered their ruddy hue, and his tread its elasticity.

As he stepped briskly along, he saw the country all around desolate. Where, in the wooded parks, the antlered deer had sported amid the rank growing grass and the brown-leaved bracken, never a buck was there; but all the palings torn up and the landmarks levelled. Where, on the pastures, the lowing herds were used to graze, never an ox; where the bleating flocks, never a sheep; where, on the wide commons, the white-coated geese were wont to wander, no hissing waddlers were there. And worse still, as he passed by the halls and big houses of the gentry, and the cosy homesteads of the well-to-do yeomen, where, from out the clustered chimneys grey

smoke was ever seen to curl, telling a tale of open-hearted hospitality and good cheer within, not a puff was there. While on the tilled lands, where the sturdy hinds drove their bullock teams and whistled contentedly at work, there was not a plough going. Nothing but dreariness met his eye, and painfully impressed his senses. His own conscience, too, alas! did not altogether give him comfort as he conned over the cause which had led to this misery; and he came to a determination to have done in future with all rebellious schemes, from whatever quarter they might issue.

The evening shadows were beginning to fall as he reached Dereham, which he found in contrast with the district he had traversed—where he had scarce met a soul —the place being all in a flurry, with soldiers in the king's livery crowding the narrow streets.

On questioning the first gossiping fellow he met, Flowerdew learnt that they formed the main body of a great army, the rear of which was a day's march behind; and that their leader was the famous Lord Warwick, who was even then in the town or quartered at the sign of the Swan.

A short reflection convinced him, that to ingratiate himself with that powerful noble would be his best chance of securing immunity for the part he had played at the outset of the riot, and speedy help for Mistress Catherine. Accordingly, he begged the man to lead him straight to his captain, for whose private ear he had valuable information.

That great noble, who afterwards, when Duke of Northumberland, played as prominent a part in Queen-making, as he was about to attempt in un-Kinging, was seated in the tavern parlour, surrounded by his

chief officers, discussing a plan for an attack on Norwich, when Flowerdew was brought in; and his arrival was, therefore, at an opportune moment.

"Ha!" said Warwick, "whom have we here?"

"A poor minstrel, may't please your lordship, who can, if such be your will, give some account of the whereabouts of this Ket, which will be found to advantage the King's cause."

"The very sort of fellow I want, i'faith!" cried Warwick. "Yet stay—what's thy price? I'll warrant the service is not a free gift."

"In sooth, my lord, I be content to leave the reward to thy judgement."

"Nay then, I hate all dalliance, so speak out straight. The king hath deputed me absolute in the matter of rewards—ay, and of punishments. Wherefore beware, min-

strel, thou play'st me not false. Even now, to my poor insight, thy speech doth betray thee to be other than thy guise. Thou'rt no ballad troller, man. Thy name and condition ?"

"I well knew, noble sir," replied Flowerdew, "this poor disguise, which hath served me to baffle Ket and his owl kind, would never hide me from Lord Warwick's eagle glance. I came hither to make a clean breast of it, relying on thine honour for pardon, if I be judged to have done amiss."

"Rest content, you shall have a free pardon, if your service be of use to us," said Warwick.

"Then I'll own me to be Andrew Flowerdew, once of Hethersett, and now of nowhere, but in sorry truth, a vagrom."

"God's truth!" cried Warwick, "has it come to this, that our gentry are turned vagabones, while these rogues sport them

in their halls? I' faith, they dance well to Fortune's piping! Stay, though, I bethink me, thou wert mixed up in the very outset of this wicked hurle. Methinks I heard thou wert with that mischievous priest at Windham May-fair?"

"I'll never deny it, noble sir," answered Flowerdew, "but confess my sin, of which I've long repented and paid penalty—ever relying on the plighted word of the great Lord Warwick."

"In that thou showest good sense, sir. Marry! as thou hast thrown thee on mine honour, I pledge thee Warwick's word thou shalt have a fair chance of earning pardon. Tell me without more ado of this puissant tanner. Art fresh from his campment?"

"Troth, my lord, I be; and there he hath lifted himself up, and playeth the king."

"B' our Ladye!" exclaimed Warwick,

"we'll uplift him yet higher i' the world than his oaken seat, even to the top of Norwich Castle, else write me no captain or prophet! Out with thy tale!"

So Flowerdew narrated all the details of Ket's camp—the looseness of discipline—the manner in which Norwich was garrisoned and defended, and how easy of surprise. Then he told how the Mistress of Thorpe, his betrothed, was kept a fast prisoner at Mousehold, to be led out as Ket's bride, unless promptly rescued.

"Now, by mine honour!" exclaimed Warwick, "even if this Lady of Thorpe hath clove to papistry, and by law forfeited our protection, yet did I know Sir Denys Haselwode for an honourable knight and valiant soldier, along with whom I've fought in many a tough contest; and, had not my lord of Northampton bespoke my offices in this matter, I would never a-brook that

one of England's gentle dames should be so mistreated. We'll succour the lady, sir. First, however, pledge thine oath never more to abet a treason against thy sovereign liege, King Edward, whom may God preserve!"

Flowerdew took the cross-hilted sword which the Earl handed him, and fervently swore the required oath, urged on by the critical position of his mistress.

Warwick then turned him over to his attendants, bidding them furnish him with appropriate gear, and announced to his officers his intention of riding for Norwich that very night, so the trumpets were soon heard sounding the call to boot and saddle.

When Flowerdew was equipped with habiliments and arms becoming to an esquire's rank, and provided with a strong horse, he found that Lord Warwick had taken decisive measures, and was carrying

out his determination to effect a night march on Norwich. One of the chief captains, Sir Marmaduke Miles, had been dispatched to hasten up a force of lansquenets, and to bring further supplies of powder, while the men were being collected from their various quarters. This done, they filed off along the Norwich road, all the baggage and encumbrances, except the cannon, being left behind for the sake of expedition.

Flowerdew was ordered to ride with the Earl in the van, as guide.

The stillness of night was broken only by the steady tramp of the men-at-arms, the rumbling of the cannon, and an occasional neigh from the troopers' horses, or the clank of their scabbards.

As they rode along the commander plied Flowerdew with many a searching question as to the chance of getting into the place

unawares, listening to his replies with keen attention. After a while the great watch fires on Mousehold were visible, and, by the distance they were apart, marked the vastness of the rebel camp.

"By my faith!" said the Earl to Flowerdew, "this fellow hath posted him well; 'twill be a tough job to dislodge him. We must try and gain the city, and so lure him down; then his multitude will be but a loss to him, for my troopers will harry them like dogs a flock of sheep. Once they turn tail the best of them will be overborne by those who love not cold steel."

Between Bowthorpe and Hillesdon he halted the men, under cover of a wood, for rest and refreshment, for like a good general he knew better than to lead them into action tired and hungry. Then riding forward as the day began to dawn,

he took a careful survey of the city which lay before him, and his experienced eye soon saw how capable the place was of offering a stout defence. On the east it was protected by the river Weasum, while on the other sides a high embattled wall surrounded it, having at the entrances gates with flanking turrets. The towers of numerous churches and chapels peeped out among the houses in the grey light, and the castle loomed big in the distance.

Warwick's plan was soon laid, and he determined to strike a quick blow. It was in truth risking much, for he had not the full strength of his men, but he reckoned Sir Marmaduke Miles, with the rest of the force, would not be many hours behind, while the advantage of pouncing on the city, ere the rebels at Mousehold could come to its aid, was too great to be missed.

Accordingly, he divided his men into

two divisions, and entrusted the command of one to Sir John Langston, with orders to attempt the Buckenham gate on the flank, while with the other he stormed the Dereham gate. As yet, it was clear his approach was unsuspected from the quietude which pervaded the city, its defenders being lulled in slumber, from which there would be for many of them a startled waking.

All being ready, the word to advance was given, and the two divisions, deploying from their shelter, marched to their respective points of attack. Orchards of trees, which lay between them and the city, fringing the road, for a while concealed their approach; but presently, the discharge of a culverin from the citadel, and the loud clanging of the church bells, gave the alarm.

Inside the walls all was flurry and confusion, many leaders and no responsible

chief—for Ket was jealous of his authority, and he was at Mousehold, where, too, his brother Will had gone. Roused from sleep by the din of the bells, the rebels ran out of their quarters, half-clad, with such weapons as first came to hand, hustling one another, gesticulating, and calling for their captains. Some fired off the culverins on the advancing foe, but the ill-directed balls did little damage. Some ran to the defence of the walls, others to the gates.

Warwick's men, on the contrary, came up with precision and steadiness till they were within shot of the walls, when his cannon were brought to the front, and, served by practised gunners, opened on the gate, which was soon smashed in, and the way being cleared, his foot soldiers pressed on to the storm.

A mass of the garrison disputed the passage of the gate, into whom the soldiers

poured a sharp musket fire, making such havoc that they were glad to run for shelter; and, at their heels, the besiegers followed in.

The medley of hinds and churls, armed with indifferent and incongruous weapons, could not withstand them, although they fought stubbornly, encouraging each other by recalling Northampton's defeat.

Warwick then brought up his horse, and the troopers riding at the charge down the streets into the midst of the disordered mass trampled them ruthlessly under their horses' hoofs. In the by-streets, however, detached parties kept up a spirited resistance, and sometimes beat the soldiers back; others, too, harassed them from the windows and roofs of the houses by throwing down stones and missiles of all sorts.

While events had thus progressed with

Warwick's division, Sir John Langston had with like success effected an entrance at the Buckenham Gate, which was but scantily defended, and coming up fell on the rebels' rear. Then, fearing lest their retreat would be cut off, they were seized by a panic, and no longer offering resistance made a general rush for the eastern outlets, from which they poured, treading one another under foot in their haste to get out.

Fortunately for the Earl, they were unaware that his ammunition was nearly spent, else they had made a stouter fight of it; but having once turned their backs cold steel accomplished the rout, which powder had initiated.

Inside the churches many terror-stricken women and timid citizens had sought shelter. In truth, the citizens of the ancient city, bandied about from pillar to

post, had of late had rather a hard time of it, and longed for their old peaceful life.

First forced to give free quarter to Ket's men; then to Northampton's troops, when he won his transient success; then again to the rebels, who returned their hospitality by freely helping themselves to the chattels of their entertainers; they now dreaded that the King's men would exact punishment of them for harbouring the rebels. The Mayor and his Aldermen had undergone the mortification of being stripped of their much-prized authority, and of promising duty to King Ket, in order to secure some immunity from the license of his men.

Master Kneebone, alderman and weaver of the city, with his spouse, Mistress Joan, and a bunch of comely daughters, were among the first to run for shelter to the Church of St. Peter Mancroft, together with Masters Grewcock the hosier, Linacre

the barber, and others. Although Master Kneebone had been the most forward of the authorities to counsel submission to Ket when he had the upper hand, yet now the little man's courage was wonderfully revived by the presence of the King's troops, and he was already pompously promising to bespeak their good offices and forbearance for all around him.

"Come now, come now, Mistress Dearlove, and you, too, Mistress Linacre, dry your tears. We of the Council will find means of securing the protection of the King's captain. Marry! am I not a calenderer warden, and are not the weavers of Lynn and Norwich forced to bring their shorn weavings hither to be dyed in ravishing colours under mine own control? And have I not half a score stout lads prenticed to the craft—although, in sooth, some of them have turned Ket's men—and who in

all Norwich can dye so motley as I—watchett, friar's grey, crane colour, or sad-new?—Ha! neighbour Tripes, thou, too, hast sought sanctuary?"

"Marry! yes, Master Warden," said Tripes; "Oh! sir, this bloody day will be a blithe, if these locusts be swept away. Why! since they've swarmed on us I've never dared to open shop; and if the pest had much longer remained, egad! I should have had neither victual nor drink; for, though you may get a whole sheep for a groat, I see not how one can buy when never a coin be earned."

"Lord ha' mercy on us!" shrieked Mistress Joan, as a stray shot came through one of the large windows, smashing the painted glass, which fell with a loud clatter on the pavement. "We shall all be shot! What shall we do? What shall we do? Oh, dear me!"

And the fat dame ran with her brood, and crouched behind a massive pier for shelter. Now and again the yells of the combatants, and the screams of the dying penetrated the church, and froze the marrow of its timid occupants. Presently, on a sudden, the door was dashed open, and a small knot of Ket's men rushed in, draggled and blood-smeared, closely followed by the soldiery. They turned on their pursuers when inside, and attempted to make a stand, but the men-at-arms carved their way in and made short work with them. Then, where the low tones of the priest were wont to steal through the arched aisles, and the soft cadences of the quire to soothe the souls of devout worshippers, the clash of weapons, the death-shrieks of the vanquished, and the yells of the victors were now heard.

The citizens had run to the altar, where the women stood screaming as they watched

the horrid sight, and Kneebone, blanched with fright when the soldiers, having finished off the rest, came towards them, shrieked out—

"Mercy, good sirs! Mercy! We be all true subjects of our Lord the King—poor citizens all—and I be Dick Kneebone, Alderman and Calenderer Warden. I pray ye save us from Ket's wild men," and down he dropped on his knees before the leader of the soldiers, who gruffly demanded—

"How know I, but that ye lie? D'ye swear ye are no Ket's people?"

"'Fore God, sir, I swear," whined the Alderman.

"And I, sir—and I—" chorussed the others.

"Marry, I believe ye!" said the soldier, contemptuously: "'Tis clear this chicken-hearted cit hath never handled steel, his white chaps are all asweat with fright, as

though himself had calendered them. Let them bide, men—Right about, we may not linger while good work 's to be done without."

With which, they strode out of the church, and Master Kneebone rose from his knees, looking somewhat small in the eyes of his neighbours and the women, by this mild termination to his lofty promise of protection.

The polished pavement was now slippery with gore, and the still figures of recumbent crusaders, brave knights, and their faithful dames, ranged along the aisles, had their marble whiteness specked and splashed with rebel blood; while about the church mutilated bodies lay stretched, some still quivering in the death agony; and the ghastly sight did not tend to quiet the nerves of the citizens.

Outside, the King's men were still haras-

sing their running foes, and by close of day all the city was in Warwick's hands, save the Castle, within the strong walls of which the garrison held out, and from the ramparts rained down showers of shot, but without effecting much damage, for their bullets chiefly struck the tops of the houses, which sheltered the soldiers from their fire.

The Earl took up his quarters at the sign of the King's Arms, and our old acquaintances Host Meeke and his spouse, whom we have seen obsequiously waiting on Ket in the hour of his triumph, were now busy currying favour with the conqueror, loading him with lavish attentions.

He was occupied in receiving the duty of Master Aldrich, the Mayor, with other civic authorities, deposed by Ket, who had hurried to pay their respects to the representative of lawful rule.

Replying to his Worship's assurance of loyalty, Warwick said, "We accept your service in all good faith, Master Mayor; wherefore go, see that all honest citizens keep to their houses, and prove their loyalty by prompt obedience—We shall hold ye bail for their good behaviour."

Waving his hand in token of dismissal, the bowing citizens departed, and he turned to his officers to give them orders. Before he could speak, however, the worthy host came forward and opened fire—

"May't please you, noble sir, this day I be a proud man, that afore all the hostels of Norwich City the mighty Lord Warwick hath chose to honour my poor house. I mind when my Lord Northampton deigned to lodge here, my Abigail was all up i'the stirrups for pride, but was mighty soon pitched from her seat, for Master Ket—nick-named King by some—came next day

to strut and lord it over us. Marry! she took her revenge, though 'twas to mine own loss, when she smashed the horn cup out of which he had drunk. And then, noble sir, she scrubbed the very stool on which he'd sat, vowing 'twas not fit an honest man should sit there till it had a washing. And—"

"Ha' done, do, Simon, thou dullhead," struck in Mistress Abigail, "why dost tire the noble captain with thy long-winded talk? Look alive, and kill that rare fat capon, which I'll baste with butter for my lord's supper—'Tis the last left of a goodly brood, I assure you, noble sir; the rest have gone to stuff the greedy bellies of these rebel rogues. There's a young pig a-roasting o' the spit, and a dish of pewets ready trussed; and I'll bake a quince pie, for your lordship will be getting hungry, I trow—Simon, broach the cask

of November brew. Alack! that we've neither Sack nor Burgundy to set afore your lordship; these spongy knaves have not left so much as a flask in all Norwich. They've drunk out a whole runlet of Rhenish, for naught but the best of victual and quality folks' drink would serve them, forsooth, who before never tasted other than ravelled bread and bacon, with a cup of small beer to swill it down—"

"Thanks, dame, for thy courtesy," interrupted Warwick, "be not troubled on mine account; we soldiers of necessity fare not over daintily, and I'll promise you we do justice to your cheer, homely though it be. Pr'ythee be gone to your kitchen. I have much to set in order ere I taste supper."

With many a low curtsy and bow the host and his dame retired, when Warwick heaved a sigh of relief—"The Lord pre-

serve me from the tongues of these chattering pies! I'd rather their cheer than their company."

But he was not yet free of the dame, who popped her head in again, to fire yet one more shot from her artillery of politeness.

"May't please your noble lordship, a company of the noise await without to sing 'Sir Guy of Warwick,' or other ballad, as your lordship chooses, in token of your great victory."

"Nay, nay, dame, I'm too busied with weighty matters to be distracted with music, albeit, doubtless merry and tuneful. Bid them begone, and from thyself I must claim privacy."

"Mercy on us!" said he, when she had gone, "that woman's tongue is like a water-mill. I'll warrant she scolds her Simon apace, for he seemeth but a poor

henpecked cock. Now for business—So far, sirs, we have prospered right well, but ye say the powder is well nigh spent. This must be seen to straightway—Captain Sanders, you be well horsed, ride forthwith to Sir Marmaduke, and bid him delay not an hour. Spare not the spurs, else by St. Peter! we shall have to get quick out of this; I'll warrant the knaves from Mousehold will be about us like hornets on the morrow—Master Flowerdew, I've not been unwatchful, thy valour hath redeemed bygone errors. Thou didst bear thee in the fray as became an English gentleman."

Flowerdew, bowing low, replied, "It is, in sooth, welcome praise, thus to hear my humble service spoke of by Lord Warwick, and I am so emboldened to ask leave to ride with the troopers, and try the mettle of King Ket with mine own sword, when he faceth us i'the field."

"That boon will I readily grant," said Warwick; "And now, sirs, go see the gates be repaired, and watchguards set. I make no doubt we shall soon have them try reprisals. Harkye, let the powder be husbanded with care, and the muster call sounded—there hath been enough blood let for one day."

The officers went out to execute his orders, and Flowerdew accompanied them to seek a lodging for the night.

CHAPTER X.

Messenger—"My lord, the army of great Buckingham!"
King Richard—"Out on ye, owls!"—

KING RICHARD III.

THE morning of King Ket's wedding day found Mousehold Camp all in a ferment. Lieutenants and deputies were fussing about telling off parties; some to make preparation for the games and sports by which the bridal was to be celebrated, others to relieve those who had been through the night tending the big cooking fires. Before these many a prime juicy ox, tender wether, and fat porket, impaled on long poles, were being turned, browning, and distilling rich gravies into the deep accommodating dripping pans

beneath, superintended by bare-armed men-cooks. Many a score of capons and plump hens, long-necked cygnets, and stuffed ducks, lay about all trussed, ready for the spit, with huge wheaten cakes and pasties ready for baking. Nor were there wanting rarer delicacies, such as were only accustomed to be seen on the tables of the very wealthy—quails and hern-shaws, shot down by the foraging parties; carp and pike, poached from the well-stocked ponds of the gentry. These it was the women's duty to dress, and the clack of their long tongues, as they brevitted about the work, vied with the hoarse tones of the men, with whom they shrilly cracked jokes.

Nor had the drink been forgotten: casks of strong ale by the dozen, stood about ready for broaching, all through the camp.

The very air was redolent with the scent

of cooking meats, which tickled the noses, and tantalised the appetites of the hungry lookers on, who were enjoying by anticipation their coming feast.

Full and clear the autumn sun shone on the yellowing tints of the Reformation Oak, where still drooped from the topmost bough the ensign of rebellion.

But now his attendants entered the pavilion of King Ket, and aroused him from his slumbers, for a deep carouse overnight had weighed down his eyelids. Then the drowsy bridegroom rose from his bed, and donned his wedding garments—spicy ones they were, too. Ket loved a smart doublet, and had ransacked Norwich to get materials to his taste. Silken hose encased his sinewy calves, and shoes of dark velvet, rosetted at the toes, held his broad feet. A doublet of crimson velvet, puffed and slashed at the sleeves with white satin, was

strained across his big chest. Trunk breeches to match figured on his legs, and a short cloak hung from his shoulders; while a black hat, red feathered, and fastened with a jewel, topped his costume. Several of the handiest of his fellows had been impressed to assist at the toilet, but their unaccustomed hands proved them bad valets, and they had many a curse bestowed on them for their clumsiness. However, the job was done at last, and the bridegroom surveyed himself with satisfaction in the polished mirror, which hung up in his tent. After refreshing himself with a deep morning draught, he dismissed the attendants, who hurried out glad to escape, and interchanging notes when out of earshot as to their governor's temper.

"I tell ye what, Dick," said Roger Mee, to one of his fellow helpers, "our Ket is in a masterful mood. I'd not stand

in his madam's shoes this day for a rose noble."

"Nor I either," answered Dick Chew; "he hath quick forgot his sugary talk, I trow; when he swore to us that all should stand foot to foot. I chanced to hear the parson say of him, as we took the good man along t'other day—'how he swimmeth o'the tide of power, yet so weighted with pride that a feather would sink him'—Methinks the parson hit the nail o'the head, Roger."

"Marry, yes!" returned Roger, "'Od rat him, he fetched me a smart thwack o'the back with his big-boned fist, because I broke the points of his doublet in the fastening, forsooth. Pah! I be downright asick of his high-stomached ways, and was half a minded to give him a hearty clout back. The saints be praised! I bethought me in time to save my neck from the hemp.

Come along, let's go see what victual's cooking—'tis an unkid wind that blows no good !"

"Marry ! then stop grumbling Roger, man," said the third fellow ; " This free life licks sulling and swine-tending, say I, despite hard words, and maybe, a cuff. My eyes ! how good the victual smells. Hark ! d'ye hear them firing cannon down in Norwich, to mark the merry day ? They're not stinting of powder—hark !"

Meanwhile the bride was submitting to the enforced attentions of the women deputed by Ket to wait on her.

Dorothy Luttrell, too, was being arrayed in a fine gown to attend on her lady at the ceremony.

Even in her present strait, Catherine Haselwode's innate pride enabled her to comport herself with dignity.

Having spent some hours of the night

in prayer, her mind was calmed, and strengthened resolutely to refuse the wedding in the face of the people, hap what might.

"The sorrow clouds have, in sooth, gathered thick around thee, sweet mistress," whispered Dorothy; "God grant that the sunshine yet peep forth and break them."

"Alack! Dolly," answered Catherine, "mefears no peace remaineth for me this side the grave. Holy Mary, help me!—mine hours of freedom now are numbered."

The waiting women, looking on the girl's pale features, felt some compassion, and, in their way, even tried to enspirit her.

"Pr'ythee, lady," said Jenny Smart, not unkindly, "look not so sad. Why, there's not a madam in all Norfolk Shire but would gladly change place with you! Here's your

petticoat—surely the like was never seen !" And Jenny gazed on the rich white satin garment with all a woman's eyes, "Naught but the best would suit King Ket's bride, I trow."

"And see what witching head gear ! 'tis of velvet, worked with Venice gold," added Polly Kiss, "and will become thee well, lady."

"Now then stop your chatter, wenches," cried Widow Goodlass, who was the chief tirewoman in virtue of her admitted knowledge of the mysteries of the toilet, she having been in early days waiting-woman to Dame Mary, wife of Sir Thomas Gresham, Lord Mayor of London. "Stop your chatter, ye but vex the lady. Pr'ythee, my mistress, let me fasten the kirtle band —so. Alack ! alack ! I vow I've broke the tag ; was ever such a cross ? Run, Jenny, fetch me stitching thread, or we

shall not be done in time. I'll not answer for our lives if we keep King Ket awaiting this day."

Mistress Haselwode patiently submitted to their fussy attentions, and in due time was attired in all her bridal finery.

Then indeed, Dorothy, vainly striving to keep back her tears, yielded to her natural impulse, and clasping her mistress in a faithful embrace, exclaimed,—

"The Blessed Virgin have thee in her keeping, dear lady, and send thee safe through this sad day, and I vow a score of candles in her honour next Candlemas."

Meantime the stout-trunked Oak, which would spread its protecting arms over the bridal group, had been tricked out with many a flag and ribbon, and looked gay as a Mayday pole. They, whose hands had been so occupied, were now waiting beneath its

branches all in a fidget for the crowning ceremony.

They were not long kept on the tenter-hooks of suspense. A company of halberdiers soon came up and took station in front of the tree, clearing a wide space. Then waiting-men came and spread a large piece of tapestry hangings for a carpet on the grass, to mark the spot where the couple should stand, placing also two high-backed oak chairs, cushioned with velvet, but not a pair, one being from Thorpe, the other being from Hethersett. These preparations done, trumpeters standing before Ket's tent blew a shrill fanfare, at which the people collected round the Oak, hustling one another as they struggled for the best places to view the sight.

They were an odd mixture, some with arms, some without. Here a hind, shouldering a pole with his scythe fixed atop to

the danger of his neighbours' limbs, elbowed a time-serving citizen or burgher. There a lieutenant in helmet and breast-plate roundly cursed those who shoved against him. In the ruck were some with axes, some with bows, others with pikes or swords. And not a few honest wives, too, in their stuff gowns and white kerchiefs proudly hanging on the arms of their warrior spouses, each one thinking there never was so brave a soldier fellow as her Jo, stood about distrustfully eying the trolls, who chattered and jested with them that would.

Amid a flourish of music King Ket stepped from his tent, and, supported by a long file of picked men, walked through his hurrahing subjects to his place. The escort was but a scurvy guard for a royal bridal, no two of them being in like uniform; indeed, the only point of similarity

between them was, that each one had a pike in his hand.

The din and the shouting pierced the ears of the bride in her prison-shed, and caused her to shrink with dread, as she realised that the moment of her trial was indeed come.

Stay, though—who are these numbers struggling on over Mousehold, the foremost of whom have even now reached the outskirts of the wedding throng?—Why, too, this sudden stillness, which succeeds the noisy cheering, as their news passes like lightning from mouth to mouth?—And why do the surging masses open their jealous ranks to push the new-comers on to the Tree?—Let events answer.

King Ket, within his guarded circle, noticed the sudden change from boisterous noise to dead silence, and, with indignant

wonder, saw the visitors approaching right to his chair. Choked with wrath, he sprang up, "Who, i' the devil's name, be ye tatterdemalions, that thrust yourselves on us in the very moment of our bridal? Ye shall hang for it.—— Guards! take the gaping varlets from my sight. Marry! their dirt-grimed cheeks will scarce be a pleasing sight to my madam, who will be here a-speed—Take them off, I say!"

But the fellows had heard news, which Ket had not, and stood looking from one to another in doubt, shifting their legs, instead of obeying orders.

"D'ye hear me, saucy knaves!" cried Ket, stamping his foot with such energy that he burst his smart shoe—"Do as I bid ye, or I'll string up every jack man of ye!"

"Nay, sir, tarry a moment, I beseech

you," said Master Hodges, "their tale is passing strange. Here, Gaffer, go tell his worship the news!"

With which he pushed the reluctant gaffer forward, who, alarmed at his reception, hung back from the furious bridegroom, till Ket seeing from the startled faces of those around that he had something of importance to tell, ordered him to speak out.

"May't please your worship," said he, between gasps, in a quavering voice, "I be downright winded with hard running. Oh! sir, there hath been such a bloody fight in Norwich streets! The king's men got in the city while we were a-bed, and made sad work with us. Oh! sir, they've clean killed many a hundred score of us, and be masters of all the place, save the castle. We've run for very life, and they be at our heels after us." So the gaffer told his

tale, and added, on his own account, some exaggeration of the numbers of the king's troops and the terrible slaughter.

"God's truth!" exclaimed Ket, "say'st so? Marry then! 'tis no time for wedding and feasting. To arms! to arms!—Haste, lose not an instant!"

The scene was now rapidly changed. Disappointed revellers saw with long faces their hopes of a merrymaking dashed, and reluctantly began to prepare for the fight instead of for play. Having already enjoyed so long a lease of idleness, they could, however, hardly complain of taking a turn at serious work; nevertheless, it must be confessed that it was tantalising to sniff the appetising odours of the cooking feast, and to buckle on their arms when their stomachs were unstayed.

The women urged on their spouses, helping them to arm, and fondly believing,

poor fools ! that no army could conquer Ket's array.

Curious were the little scenes enacted about the encampment. One could see the stout-limbed churl—once a contented soil-tiller, till his head was turned by Ket's palaver—giving a parting bus to his comely wife ; the idle wastril from the town embracing his smirking light-o'-love, and promising mighty fine presents after the expected victory ; lieutenants fussing about hallooing and gesticulating to their men, looking up absentees and the backward, who sneaked in the tents and pits ; and groups of lads buckling on their arms as they boisterously jested with each other.

At length the army was got under arms after its fashion, and a meal of cold meat with beer served out to each ; then they were marshalled for further enspiriting to

the sacred Tree, which Ket ascended, and in loud tones addressed them,—

"Good friends, who have chose me your King, remember we be all i'the same boat, and let us now put a crowning stone on the structure we have so far builded well. Bethink ye how impotent these few trainbands will be against our many, we'll tread them under foot as we did afore and let none escape by light heels this bout.

Comrades, i'the face of ye all, I swear to pay fifty crowns to him who shall bring in their proud Captain, dead or alive. Let's go to the fight hand in hand, and shoulder to shoulder, then the job will be the speedier done, and we the quicker back with wholesome appetites for the feast. God save ye all!"

Which said, he descended, and mounting his charger put them in motion. Then,

with banners waving, and to the sound of trumpet and drum, they poured down Mousehold into the broad valley of Dussingdale.

The shrill trumpetings, the rattle of arms and the buzz, reached the ears of Dickson, as he lay in prison, along with Sir Giles, forgotten and neglected by all.

"Hark! 'tis the rush to Ket's bridal," said Will, "d'ye hear the music, Sir? I'll wager they are having a procession for the bride—ah! what a merry day they'll make on't!" And poor Will sighed at the vision of pleasure from which he was debarred.

"Marry now!" replied Sir Giles, "you're out for once—that I'll lay a rose noble on —'tis no procession, but the tramp of men keeping beat, else mine old ears deceive me. Couldst climb up to yonder peep-hole i'the gable, where the wise builder hath left a

brick or two out, as a passage hole for bats and owls? You shall mount on my shoulders. Time was, some forty years agone, when Giles Starling carried as big a springal as you pickaback in the footrace at the great birthday merrymaking when Sir Denys Haselwode came to man's estate —and won the prize, too; 'twas a bran new suit of harness—methinks he be not so degenerate but he can bear thee a space on his shoulders."

Will fell in with the knight's humour, and setting to work piled all the lumber of the place beneath the hole, and, having helped Sir Giles up, scrambled on to his shoulders, where, sitting astride, he was able to see through the loophole.

"Why! sir," cried he, in amazement, "they be all a marching in full equipment down Mousehold, with the big flag, too, which myself have carried. And yonder

rideth King Ket, on a dappled grey, that seemeth to go springhalt."

"Eh?" exclaimed the knight beneath, in a fury, "on a dappled grey—and going springhalt—sayest thou? A pest on him! I'll warrant 'tis mine own brave nag, that hath carried me many a year across his back."

"Ay, and that it is, sir," answered Will, "now I bethink me, Ket got the grey at the sacking of your house."

"The devil take him for an impudent rogue!" said Sir Giles, with zest; and the good knight eased his feelings with a volley of epithets, which he launched at the purloiner of his steed.

When the army and its followers had all passed by, Dickson slid down, and Sir Giles rubbed his shoulders heartily. "My heart! You're a swipper springal, but no mean weight. I wonder why our jailor

hath forgot us to-day, my belly craveth for breakfast. Marry, how still the place be got! I'll warrant we be clean forgot i' the racket, and belike shall be left to starve."

"I'm a thinking, sir," replied Will, "'tis a rare chance for us to try and break out. All is still as death without. If I could get to the peephole again, I'd soon pull out bricks enough to let us through."

"Well thought on!" exclaimed the knight; "Come along, come along, mount up;" and he climbed impetuously up the lumber heap, and bent his proud old back again for Will to get up.

The bricks were, one by one, easily loosened, till a hole was made big enough for a man's head and shoulders, when Will crept through, and looked about to see if the noise of the falling rubbish had attracted attention. But perfect stillness reigned over the camp, except where the

cooks were congregated round the fires, and they were all some distance off, and so busily engaged as to render it unlikely their notice would be attracted.

Then, setting lustily to work, he soon cleared away a whole quarter of the brick-nogging till there was space enough and to spare for a man to get through, when he slid down, and helped Sir Giles to clamber up, which was a job of some difficulty, for the knight was stiffish in the limbs. However, he was up at last, and through the hole, from which he managed to drop quietly to the ground. Will, more lissom, found little trouble in following suit, and on feeling the soft turf again beneath his feet, yielded to impulse, cut a caper, and actually had begun to strike up a deep base stave of triumph, when his companion, in a tremor, clapped his hand over his mouth.

"Hist! man, hist! hold your tongue! Art mad, to yelp out like a dog just freed from the collar chain? Wait till we've put a mile or two atween this place and us; then, egad! I'll join ye in a lusty song with all my voice and lungs. How dost know but that some lagbehinds will pounce out on us? Let's make us scarce."

Will sobered at once, and cautiously led the road through the lines of empty huts, taking care to give the cooking parties a wide berth. He could not help looking in as they passed his old quarters, when he saw many of his belongings littered about. His successor had evidently gone off in a hurry, leaving untouched a great wheat loaf and some venison ribs, by which stood a black jack, half full of ale.

"Hi'! sir," said he, beckoning his companion, who was disinclined to linger, "let's take a snack to stay our stomachs,

while we may; we're not likely to get a better chance of breaking fast. Here's good victual and drink."

To this proposition the knight gave a willing ear, nor did he afterwards scruple to help himself to a pistol and leather shot belt, which lay handy; while Will buckled on a cutlass. Thus refreshed, and provided with means of self-defence, they resumed their journey with more confidence.

"See, your worship," said Will, as they went along, "yonder 's Mistress Haselwode's prison; methinks 'twould be but a just and a righteous act to try and free the misused lady—though, to be sure, the womenkind will be somewhat of a hamper for us o'the road."

"Ha!—*that* Mistress Catherine's lodging!" cried Sir Giles. "We'll get her out, man. I'd scorn to slip off scot free, and leave the maiden in distress to pine for

a rescue. A fig for the hamper! By my knighthood, I'll not stir another peg without her!"

And the doughty knight ran up to the door of the hut, from which the guard had gone after his fellows to watch the fight. Promptly loosing the bolts, he threw open the doors, and discovered Catherine and her woman arrayed for the wedding.

The Mistress of Thorpe at once recognised her visitor, and came forward with outstretched hand, which he raised to his lips with respectful courtesy, but stifled all her eager expressions of wonder—

"Hush! lose not an instant; pull off those fine petticoats and get your hoods. We'll stay without till ye be apparelled."

While they were thus engaged, he and Will Dickson discussed which road it would be safest to take, and finally resolved to make for yeoman Goodeve's house at Down-

ham, in the hope that he would be able to tell them of a hiding place till they could get out of Ket's country. They were not long kept waiting by the lady, and succeeded in getting off unperceived by any stragglers—Dorothy and Dickson going first, while Catherine followed, leaning on the knight's arm.

Will showed the way by a cross-country path, with which he was well acquainted.

As they went along, Sir Giles entertained his companion with a full account of the circumstances which had enabled him and Dickson to escape from their prison and effect her rescue, while Ket and his men were, as he supposed, gone out to meet the king's army.

"I pray God prosper the king's cause," said Catherine, with a sigh.

"Amen to that, fair sweetheart," assented

the knight, heartily; "I fear, though, the King's men will have a tough job, these Norfolk churls fight with pluck, as my Lord Northampton found to his cost, I trow."

"In sooth, they do," said Catherine; "This Ket, too, will stick at naught to work his will. Ah, me! I shudder when I bethink me how I stood, but a few short hours ago, awaiting with sinking heart his call to the bridal. It seemeth now a very miracle, and you, kind sir, heaven's messenger—Ave Maria!"

"The saint be praised, Mistress Kate, that sent your bridegroom off to fight, instead of to love, i'the nick of time. Marry! how he'll gape and rave when he finds the pretty bird flown—if he win, which God forefend! I'd rather forfeit my spurs than have missed this chance of checkmating

King Ket. We must hasten though; if he catch us 'twill be death to me, and worse to thee."

Relapsing into silence, the little party walked briskly forward, urged on by the prospect of the dread fate their recapture might bring on them.

CHAPTER XI.

"Oft have I seen a hot o'er weening cur
Run back and bite, because he was withheld;
Who, being suffered with the bear's fell paw,
Hath clapp'd his tail between his legs, and cry'd:
And such a piece of service will you do,
If you oppose yourself to match Lord Warwick."

KING HENRY VI.

JUST as the bells of the Norwich churches were tolling out curfew toll, on the evening of the capture of that city by Lord Warwick, Sir Marmaduke Miles with his lansquenets and troopers, escorting the ammunition waggons and baggage, rode with a loud clatter into the streets.

Their arrival created much stir in the already crowded place, and great difficulty was experienced in finding billets for the

men, and stabling for the horses. By the aid and activity of the Mayor this was, however, accomplished; and then, the soldiery being cared for, the city settled down to quiet. Its citizens had obeyed the orders of Master Aldrich, and kept within their doors; while those of the rebels, who had been unable to get out of the gates, and had so far escaped the hunt, lay hid in vaults, cellars, and other secret places, not daring to show their noses. All about the streets the corpses of the slain lay just as they had fallen, for Warwick had been unwilling to tax his tired men with burial duty, and had preferred to wait and impress the job on the citizens next morning.

At cockcrow the trumpets sounded, and the soldiers and citizens, alike drowsy, turned out. Then, indeed, all was bustle and energy—troopers washing and cleaning

their horses and arms under the eyes of vigilant sergeants, and captains preparing reports of the numbers of dead and wounded.

Now and again the rebels, who still held out in the Castle, sent a shot spinning down, crashing into the roofs and chimneys of the houses, as an unpleasant reminder of their propinquity.

The look-out men early brought word in of the advance of Ket's big army to Dussingdale, where Warwick promptly determined to meet him in the open field, instead of awaiting an assault at Norwich; only leaving a small force behind to check the garrison of the Castle.

As his troops marched orderly out, the citizens with their wives and daughters watching from the windows, cried, "God speed," and devoutly wished them luck; and many a trim lass cast sheep's-eyes on

the smart troopers riding by. They knew the contest would resolve itself into a fight between discipline and numbers, but on the side of the former was the prestige of recent victory, and a full confidence in the leader—both good auguries of future success.

On Dussingdale King Ket had halted his men, and drawn them up in three long lines. His artillery, consisting chiefly of small ship cannon, was placed in the front, and opened on the King's troops as they came in sight, but with little effect.

The Earl rapidly formed his troops in two lines, and ordered the immediate advance of his lansquenets on the right and left, while the horse charged in the centre. Meantime, Ket and his lieutenants were not idle, but could be seen galloping along their lines which overlapped Warwick's army on each flank.

As the King's foot came within range, their well-directed volleys told with fearful effect on the ill-armed masses who opposed them, and whose numbers, as Warwick had foreseen, only proved to their disadvantage and helped their confusion. Ket's centre received Sir Marmaduke and his horse with an irregular discharge from their pieces, but before they could re-prime the troopers dashed amongst them, riding them down like sheep.

In vain Ket shouted encouragement; the first lines, shattered and broken, turned and pressed on their supports, throwing the rear ranks into confusion. Panic-stricken, they began to give way on all sides, and then the victorious troopers made cruel work amongst them. Here and there a determined band faced the soldiers, and sturdily maintained a hand-to-hand struggle, but by the rest no further

stand was attempted, they even threw away their arms to run the faster.

Flowerdew at the onset had charged with the foremost rank, and carved a way through his clustered opponents in an endeavour to reach King Ket, whose loud voice he heard ever and anon above the din, shouting his watch cries, "A Ket! a Ket!" "Freedom and Reform!" and whom he saw in the distance galloping hither and thither, striving to spirit his men.

Then Flowerdew, like the rest, with his blood up, borne along on the wave of battle, had used his sword with vigour. But on realising that the day was won to the cause of order, he sickened of the carnage; for the King's troops were, indeed, taking a fearful revenge for their former defeat on the misled and disheartened men, who before had faced them with success.

The air was filled with shouts for mercy,

with the war cries of the victors, and the shrieks of the dying, as the huddled masses of runaways were shot, and ridden down by scores. Of Ket he could see nothing, but sagely guessed that he had entrusted the care of his skin to the speed of his good horse.

All his energy was therefore bent on the rescue of Mistress Haselwode, and fear lest she should suffer indignity at the hands of the inflamed soldiery, or from the scattered rebels, forced him on with the first, who were even now pushing through the camp. Mousehold heath was covered with terrified women and fugitives running hither and thither, through whom he rode, none offering resistance, straight to the shed where he remembered she was imprisoned. Springing from his horse, he pushed open the door, when he saw the place empty, and the wedding finery tossed on the floor, with

every sign of the hasty flight of its inmates. Disappointed, and tired with his exertions, he stood irresolute, racking his brains as to the best course to follow, when Sir Marmaduke Miles rode up with a troop, and Flowerdew briefly told him that she was gone.

"Ha! say'st so?" said the Knight, dismounting and looking in the door, "It seemeth to my poor wit, sir, that Ket hath took the lady with him to share his flight. Stay though—let's search i'the huts and caves around; maybe he hath hid her away, and himself lurketh hard by. My lord, the Captain-General, straitly charged us to rescue her, once we got into the camp. And then, too, if we but catch the tanner King, 'twill be a hundred crowns amongst my troop."

With the Captain's comfort Flowerdew was obliged to content himself, and he

accompanied the troopers as they searched with a will through the camp, till the evening shades fell on their unsuccessful labours.

King Ket had got clear off, and none of the searching parties brought in any tidings of him, whom most of all the King's General wished to capture. Seated in Ket's tall-backed chair, that great noble, was engaged with his officers when Flowerdew sought an interview. As he entered the tent, Warwick was speaking,—

"Sound the recall! enough blood hath been let to-day to tame these wild spirits. The snowball hath melted, and cannot gather again! On the word of a peer of England, I say it were a downright sin to stamp out the race of Norfolk churls, who lacked but a bold leader—one who knew well none can be a conqueror, save he despise death—to have fought a stouter

fight. Wherefore, sirs, I say, stop the slaughter, but search for their leaders, whose sorry lives shall pay forfeit for this day's work."

Then observing Flowerdew, he beckoned him up,—

"What of Mistress Haselwode? Have ye found her?"

"Alas! my lord," replied Flowerdew, bowing low, "her prison was empty; she hath gone, but left no trace of her whereabouts. A rebel wench, loitering without, told me that she was to have been wedded this very morning to King Ket—the girl helped to tire her for the bridal—when tidings came of the fight in Norwich streets, so the bold tanner stopped the wedding and the feasting, quoth she, till your lordship was first drubbed—thus he promised them from his Oak."

"Marry, then," said Warwick, "me-

thinks we have spoiled his merry-making! But sir, believe me, I am grieved you've not yet lighted on your mistress. Take a troop, and scour the country round; fortune will surely favour you—so true a knight deserveth to find his sweetheart. It may chance she stole out when the coast was clear, for she is of a bold and daring stock, and, if so, can scarce be got far—And now, sirs," continued he, turning to his officers, "here be victuals enough and to spare, wherefore see ye to the men's comfort; they've well earned their supper, and afterwards ourselves will taste this banquet which King Ket hath prepared to welcome us."

While events were thus favourably progressing with the King's troops, Dickson, guiding his party across wide commons, and through narrow woodpaths, had brought them into Goodeve's kine croft.

Although both mistress and maid had trodden bravely on, yet their cavaliers could tell, from the increased weight each bore on his arm, that their strength was well nigh spent.

A light, twinkling in the kitchen window, shewed the household were not yet abed; and it was hurriedly decided that Will should go on first and see the farmer, while the rest waited in the Croft.

Will went, nothing loth, and peeped in at the kitchen window, where he saw Margery and John at their supper, which a glance shewed him was more frugal than of yore, when the yeoman's board was wont to groan under the weight of its substantial cheer. Peggy was flitting about waiting on her parents; and so homelike was the scene, and so loveable did the girl look in Will's eyes as she went affec-

tionately through her little offices, that he stood rivetted, unable to tear himself away or to disturb the family group.

So he stayed, oblivious of his errand, till a shrill scream from Margery, whom he saw stop in the act of conveying a jorum of pottage to her lips, and stare with startled eyes at the window, recalled him to his senses. Going round to the door he lifted the latch, and entered just in time to catch Peggy in his arms, as she came to see who the intruder was, and to greet her rosy cheeks with a hearty kiss.

"Lawk-a-mercy-me! mother," cried she, "'tis our Will, there's naught to be afeared on, I trow," and she brought him into the kitchen.

"Lack a day! Will, thou didst give me a rare start," said the dame; "I took ye for a ghost. We heard you were

prisoned at Mousehold, and by this King Ket, too. Bless you! our wench hath well nigh cried her eyes out for thee."

"Troth," quoth Will, "I be a free man now, and come to crave a welcome, good mother. How dost do, gaffer?"

"Well enough in body, Will, but ill enough in pouch," replied Goodeve—"Indeed, I be well nigh broke. These Ket's men came a day or two agone, and stole my last sturk, with half a score fat young grunters; saying, forsooth, they were for the grand wedding feast of this king of theirs."

"Ah! yes, and ransacked the hen yard," lamented Margery—"rogues as they be! They took off every cackler of this year's hatch, and even the old gander. 'Tis a comfort they'll find him a tough morsel; he's a ten year old bird come Valentine's day. Plague take them! Ah! dear

me! though, 'tis hard to bear," sighed she, wiping her tears away with her apron edge; "I know not how we'll fare for bit and sup this winter—never a corn gathering, and now never a swine nor chick left. Come, lad, wilt taste this pottage? 'tis squeasy, and thou'rt hungry, belike."

"Ah! do Will," said Goodeve, "I be downright glad to see ye."

"And so be I, Willie," piped Peggy; "We've been sore troubled for thee—how didst steal away?"

"'Tis a short tale and soon told, sweetling—I be scarce six hours fled from the camp, where ye must know Ket was to have wedded this very day with the Lady of Thorpe; and all was ready when word came that the King's men were at hand; so the wedding and the merry-making, methinks, were shelved; and when the camp was empty of them a-marching to the fight,

I broke out of prison along with Sir Giles Starling—ye know the good knight—and on our way we brought off Mistress Haselwode along with her woman, who await me without i'the Kine Croft, dead tired; and I be sent to beseech ye to find some hiding hole for her away from Ket's men."

"The Mistress of Thorpe in our croft! Troth, let's waste never a moment longer in talk," exclaimed Goodeve, jumping up—

"Stay—let me think—I know of no better hiding for the night, and a warm, than at Appletree barn, on t'other side the spiny, 'twixt it and the coppice wood. 'Tis snug, and filled with boltins of sweet oat straw, beneath which ye can creep, or slip out into the wood behind if any come prying. Hie thee, Peggy, put up bread and butter, and the bit o'salted sparerib, in a basket with a flask of mead. 'Twill be but rough fare for the lady, but is the best

Jack Goodeve owneth, and the sparerib hath been sprinkled i'the cooking with spearmint and sage, so 'tis no unsavoury victual. Hark ye, Margery, keep a shrewd tongue an any call while I be gone, and make up some fine Canterbury tale to put them on the wrong scent. I know thy ready wit of old."

With which the kind-hearted yeoman, snatching up a lanthorn, started off, accompanied by Peggy and Will. They found the others waiting impatiently in the Croft, and then, together, went to the barn, Goodeve shewing the way.

He took them round to the back, where it abutted on the coppice wood, and shewed them a small door, by which they entered. The dim light of the lanthorn disclosed the place, divided into two parts by the straw; the chief door, which opened in the field, giving access to one part, the back door

from the wood into the other. Between the two, boltins were heaped up to the tie beam of a gaunt roof. Rats and mice scuttled off at their entrance, and disturbed bats flitted aloft; while the wind, which had risen high, finding its way through the cracks, caused the roof timbers to crack with every gust. Yet was it a very haven of refuge to the fugitives.

"'Tis but a sorry lodging, Mistress," said honest Goodeve, "but if it serve to hide ye from the eyes of Ket, 'twill be better than a fairer parlour."

Then he set about arranging the trusses to make a sort of couch for the weary women, while Peggy pressed her food on them; which done, taking up his lanthorn, he wished them a happy deliverance from the perils of the night, and, promising to send word if any danger should betide, withdrew with his daughter.

Mistress Catherine and Dorothy were both soon dozing, but Sir Giles and Dickson watched through the night till morning, when they also succumbed, tired out by the day's exertions.

They were startled out of a sound sleep by the tread of a heavy footfall, followed by a clatter at the door of the other compartment of the barn, as someone tried impatiently to undo the fastening. There was barely time for them to rouse the women and whisper caution, before the door was opened; when they distinctly heard some one enter and fling himself down on the crackling straw.

"Zounds! we're in a pretty pickle," whispered Sir Giles, "I'll warrant he's a Ket's man got astray from the others, who verylike be down at Goodeve's, and hath turned in here for a snug bed. Shall we fall on him? we be two to one."

"No, sir," returned Will, "methinks we had best be still till he be got to sleep, when we can slip out of doors. If we fall on him, his cries will fetch the others, who belike are handy."

"In truth, I'm puzzled which 'twere best to do," answered the Knight. "If he be a Ket's man, we had better tackle him while the odds be two to one, than wait till all the posse come yelping down on us, like a pack of beagles."

The clatter made by the new comer as he unharnessed, prevented him hearing the whispers of his neighbours, who plainly perceived that he was settling himself down on the straw, and listened intently for the sound of a snore or the heavy breathing of sleep. But the restless visitor gave no sign of being other than fully awake, as he lay muttering and tossing about to the discomfort of his neighbours, whose suspense

was, after some hours, increased by the unwelcome sound of other voices without. Then, indeed, with sinking hearts they prepared to see the cup of hope dashed from their lips.

"Now, we be caught like trapped rats!" breathed the Knight in Will's ear, "'Twould have been better to have settled with yonder knave."

"Hist! sir," whispered Will, "hark at him!"

To judge from his lively bustle, he was no better pleased than they at the approach of visitors, for they heard him pitching the boltins about fiercely for a time, and then all was still.

"Poor devil! he's hid him under the straw," whispered Sir Giles, "i'faith! we've been frightened at a shadow; he's but some poor runaway like us."

The Knight's loquacity was stopped by

a sudden rattling at the other door, which was then thrown open, and a stern voice exclaimed—

"What! empty! You've been trifling with us, knave, and led us on a fool's errand."

"Fore God! sir, I swear, 'twas the very truth I told ye," humbly replied a quavering voice, "He was riding hard towards Windham when his grey nag fell, and then he slipped into the coppice wood—and so I said, methought Yeoman Goodeve's barn, belike, would be his burrow for the night."

"Well, we'll soon see," returned the other. "Now my men, bestir ye, look if he be hid beneath the straw."

A chorus of shouts soon announced a successful search, and the same voice continued—

"Be this the dog fox? Art sure 'tis he?"

"Marry yes! sir, this is he whom folks

do call King Ket. I know him well enough, I trow," returned the other, briskly enough, now.

"Yes, 'tis he, and no mistake," put in another, whose voice the listeners at once recognised as Flowerdew's.

"So! so!" pursued the first speaker. "This, then, is that mighty Captain, who led his churls to battle and left them in the lurch. Most puissant King, thy day is over! Wherefore I pray your mightiness to grace me—but a poor captain in the King's service—with your company to the presence of my Lord Warwick, who hath a strange fancy to see thee——"

"God save King Edward!"—shouted lustily from over the straw—stopped the startled captain short, nor was his wonder lessened when the knight came forward to explain the circumstances, which had brought him and his companions there.

Flowerdew, scarcely able to credit his good fortune, slipped out while he was talking, and ran round to greet his long lost mistress.

Over the lovers' meeting we will draw a respectful veil, and leave our readers to imagine the rapturous delight with which they met, after so long and eventful a separation.

When the fuss had somewhat subsided, the Captain turned his attention to the prisoner, who had stood sulky and bewildered, silently watching the scene, and scarce believing his ears.

"Bind him safe, and mount him behind a trooper. 'Tis time we were on the road back, so we'll leave these billing sweethearts to follow as they list."

His orders were promptly obeyed, and the unfortunate Ket, who maintained his sullen silence, having been hoisted up be-

hind one of the men, with his arms securely tied, and a sash passed round his neck and fastened to the soldier's waist belt, the little troop trotted off to Mousehold with their prize.

"A collar, a collar, the tanner he said,
I trow it will breed sorrow ;
After a collar cometh a halter,
I trow I shall be hang'd to-morrow."
KING EDWARD IV. AND THE TANNER OF TAMWORTH.

CHAPTER XII.

"The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning."
TEMPEST.

A SHORT time has elapsed since the day which witnessed the downfall of King Ket and the happy meeting of Mistress Catherine and Flowerdew.

This chasm we purpose to bridge over, and carry our readers to old Michaelmas-tide in Windham, which place was now again beginning to resume its wonted state; the stalls in the streets to display their tempting wares; and the market to be frequented by those of the yeomen who had been lucky enough to save any of their possessions from the clutch of Ket's followers.

The energetic measures adopted by Lord Warwick had completely crushed out the heart of the rebellion, and the peasantry gladly settled down to peace after the shock they had received on the bloody field of Dussingdale, when thousands of them perished, and their leader had fled only to be captured.

Warwick had wisely contented himself with the slaughter then done, and caused proclaim of pardon to be made in the King's name to all those, who brought in their arms, and promised to turn quietly to their accustomed pursuits. But of the leaders he determined to make a great public example, and carried off the unlucky King of the Oak along with his brother and other of his chief lieutenants, whom he had caught, up to London; whence, after a speedy trial, they made one more journey, and that back again to their native

parts. Then, with the silent acquiescence of the people, King Ket was hung in chains from the ramparts of Norwich Castle, and his misguided brother on Windham Steeple, where their ghastly bodies now swung—a warning to others of the end that overtakes rash and presumptuous folly. The branches of the Reformation Oak, too, were hideously decorated with other trophies of the victor, for from its topmost boughs nine of Ket's chief lieutenants hung.

How strange is the progress of events! And who of those that felt the stern-handed might of this triumphant soldier, would then have dreamt that he, in turn, would fall a sacrifice to that ambition, which a year or two afterwards prompted him to try his own hand at queen-making?

On this Michaelmas day, the autumn winds blowing rudely about her petticoats, our old friend Margery Goodeve, in her

warm, well worn, cloak, was trudging down the street along with her gossip, Cicely Busswell, the bailiff's spouse, both evidently enjoying a confidential chat.

Let us for once play the eavesdropper, we may chance to hear some news.

"Bless me!"—it was Cicely speaking—"Peggy to be wedded on St. Crispin's day; and to Will Dickson, after all! Dearheart alive!"

"Ay, in sooth she is, gossip," replied Margery, "and the bridal's to be done at Thorpe, in the mistress's own church—for she would have no nay—and on the selfsame day that she weddeth Master Flowerdew. What d'ye think o'that? Then she hath got the wench her wedding gown, and I know not what gifts beside—so many be they—and hath set to Will, whom she calleth her preserver, two score acres of pasture anigh the hall with a cosy homestead, free of all

rent save a peppercorn. Oh! he's in high favour, I'll warrant you, and Jack and I be both bidden to the feast and merry-making."

"Well, I never did hear tell of the like afore!" said her friend, "It a'most passeth credit. But this I will say, Margery, the wench is downright good, and hath deserved her luck."

Now, although dame Margery hath spoken so glowingly of her daughter's prospects, it would appear that something she did not approve of yet lurked in the back ground, for she gave a somewhat dissatisfied sniff of dissent to her companion's congratulations; and, after a profound sigh, seemed resolved to unbosom her discontent.

"Marry, come up!" said she; "let me tell thee, Cicely, that my Peggy might ha' been a lady—not a gentleman's madam,

only, but a quality dame—had she but lifted her little finger. But, la! bless you! naught could turn her from Will. Ah! well," sighed she, "maybe 'tis all for the best, who can tell?"

Cicely, secretly incredulous, nevertheless expressed proper astonishment at Margery's tale, and persuaded her to walk round and see the bailiff, no doubt hoping to do a stroke of business at the same time, for she said—

"Mistress Haselwode may want to buy her wedding fallals, belike, and then Peggy can just whisper in her ear that none better than Dick Busswell's can be got for love or money in all Windham—ay, or Norwich city either. Come, let's hasten on."

As they passed by the church, the wind rushing round the steeple caused the ghastly body swinging aloft to rattle its chains, and effectually stopped the women's

tongues for a time, who, shivering with dread, pressed on to avoid the gruesome sight.

At the door of his stall the worthy burgher stood, rubbing his hands together after his custom, and looking more contented far than when we last saw him, for times were better and trade looking up. He greeted the dame with his usual heartiness—

"Welcome, old friend, I be glad to see thee, but—mercy me! you're somewhat less lusty in form than of yore, afore that traitor Ket was King,"

"Very like, Dick," replied Margery, "I've lost flesh, but 'tis for the lack of good victual. You know they took my goodman's sturks and stots, muttons and porkers, so we had right little chance of getting a bit of fresh meat while Bob Ket was King. Ah, 'twas a doleful time."

"Marry! I believe ye," said Busswell. "A pretty dance he led us all with his rascally rout! I ever said—and ye'll bear me out, wife,—that his reign would be but a short, if a proudful one; and I thought of the wise saying, "Pride that dineth on vanity shall sup on contempt."

"Thou wast a true prophet, Master Dick," said Margery. "Thank God, his day's over, and an unkid sight he is to see! I would he had a decent bere—Honest folk can now eat their sup in peace, and keep their hens and eggs for market-day. Why, now I bethink me, 'tis the first Michaelmas for many a year I've not had a green goose for ye. Alack! the goslings were all stole, and went to fill the hungry paunches of Ket's men."

Cicely Busswell, who had during the conversation worn an air of mystery, as though she had something to communicate,

now favoured him with a detailed account of Peggy's approaching wedding, at which the worthy man pricked up his ears, seeing a chance of doing business.

"And so Peggy's soon to be wedded, is she, Margery? In sooth, I be glad to hear of it. You'll be wanting a smart gown for the churching, I'll warrant. Look ye here, I'll show you stuffs that'll make your very eyes water. I've woollens good as any ever calendered in Norwich, sadnew, puke, tawney, or murrey, whichever you may fancy. And I've rich damasks broidered in azure and scarlet, and all manner of silks wove by the silkwomen, fit for the Mistress of Thorpe herself. Or, if she had rather, I've Naples fustian and Brussels satin, sarcenet and velvet, tartron and camblet, laces and corses—but you shall see, Margery, you shall see, and judge for yourself—

Jack," this to his apprentice, "fetch me down yonder bale of stuffs."

The brisk lad promptly brought it to his master, who, removing the packing, disclosed to the dame's admiring gaze sundry pieces of gaily dyed stuffs.

"There," cried he triumphantly, "what d'ye think of this?" taking up the stuff and folding and twisting it in the light to show off the various shades, "Or this? Or this? I'll warrant none could take thee for other than an Alderman's madam, if thou hadst a gown of this tawney with a white lawn partlet. I've a parcel handy—Jack, fetch the lawn."

Cicely, standing by, ably seconded his efforts with energetic nods and becks, and encouraging nudges, while Margery faltered out—

"I'd love a gown of that tawney, but

alack! the bad times have left my pouch so bare of coin that I've never a groat to spare. No, friend Dick, pr'ythee put it up again."

"Nay then, never let that fret thee, Margery," cried Busswell, eager to do business, "I'll credit thee till next Candlemas, if need be. Never fear, Peggy will see that her own mother wanteth not for a crown, now she be in luck's way."

Cicely, too, plucked her by the sleeve. "'Tis a rare chance, let it not slip, but take him at his word while he's i' the mood. He's a very weathercock, and belike may change his mind."

This settled Margery, who closed hands on the bargain, and so the stuff was transferred to her capacious basket, her thoughts already in fancy's region wandering, as she debated how to have it cut best becoming.

"I'll have the sleeves puffed, Cicely,

like the gown Dame Starling wore last Easter, which became her finely. Her shape is not unlike mine own, I trow—yet, no," pursued she reflectively, "maybe Mistress Haselwode will mislike me so, and deem it unseemly for a yeoman's wife to look like a quality dame; methinks I'll have it cut plain." In discussing the style and fashion of this gown the women's tongues rattled on till the shades of evening began to draw in, when Margery bade farewell to her dear gossips, and started off homewards in high feather with her treasures snugly packed in her basket.

Master Busswell accompanied her down the street, and, having watched her out of sight, returned to his spouse to expatiate with wonder on Peggy's fortune.

"Ah!" said she, with a wise look, "but you know not all she told me. Why! what shouldst say if I told ye another wanted

her to wife—a better far than yokel Will? For my part I've but poor thought of him, since he went out with Ket. Marry, he may thank his stars he hangeth not aloft with him! But 'tis a secret, Dick, and I may not tell."

"Tut! tut!" said the inquisitive man, "out with it, I can't abear secrets with any folks, and surely 'twixt man and wife it were rank sin."

"That may be true enough," replied Cicely, "but then what would Margery say, goodman, if I betrayed her trust?"

"Pshaw! she'll never know. Bailiff Busswell can be trusted to keep a close mouth, I trow. Out with it."

But the dame was inclined to be contrary, and to tease her husband; or else she waited for a bribe, for she remained deaf to his arguments.

Dick Busswell, however, accustomed of

old to her ways, knew how to make her open out; and, catching up a smart kerchief which lay as a tempting bait for some stray customer, he tied it round her unresisting neck, saying—

"Nay then, sweetheart, keep your secret and this kerchief, as a reward for thy discreet tongue."

The sly fox accompanied his gift with a hearty kiss, and got his end, for the delighted dame was only too eager to repay the debt.

"Ha' done, do, Dick!" cried she, coquettishly, her face puckered with smiles, "I vow you're more like a lad at his first courting, than a sober-minded burgher, turned fifty. Methinks I'll trust thee, after all; so many years be a fair warranty of discretion. Well then, you must know that when Margery told me of her Peggy's wedding, methought it were but kind to

praise the wench and her sweetheart, just for old acquaintance sake. But, lack a day! I made a sad mistake, for she turned on me quite startup, and spake out sharp that her Peggy, forsooth, might ha' been a quality lady, an she would, instead of a plain yokel's wife. And she said that some great lord had wooed her, and was sorely put about she would not say him yea. What d'ye think o'that for Gaffer Goodeve's wench ?"

"Pish!" answered Dick, "she was but a gammoning you;" purposely making light of her story, now that he had drawn the news. "Credit me, the noble wanted her not to wife, but for a pastime. My word, you're easy deceived, dame!"

"Now, out on thee for an unbelieving oaf!" cried Cicely. "Why, thou canst not even dream how a well-favoured wench can lure either gallant knight or merchant ad-

venturer. Well do I remember, as if it were yesterday, when I was a young lass, how many a gentle cast eyes on me. Ah, me!" and the good dame sighed, "who knows but Cicely Tomkins might ha' been a quality dame, and ha' ridden on a pillion dressed in satin, had she not listened to thee, Dick; but now she has to go afoot and wear plain stuff, drink ale instead of Burgundy, and serve instead of being waited on."

Master Busswell now tried wisely to stop his wife's reminiscences, knowing, by experience, that when once the floodgates of her fancy were drawn, its rush was often aggravating, and always overwhelming.

"Marry! dame, depend on't 'twas thy fate to be but a burgher's wife—albeit, the bailiff—and not reckoned small of by Windham folk. Time will fade the fairest rose, wherefore ye be not like to better yourself

nowadays. You'll scarce want a journey up to Paul's with a peck of oats for St. Uncumber, I trow; as you did in times back to proffer a white loaf and a pot of ale, which we brewed a purpose, to St. Germayn, for the saint played thee false, and vouchsafed us never a chick. No, no, we've jogged so long together, dearheart, you'd not love to be uncumbered of me."

Tears started into Cicely eyes, as she cried—

"Welaway! canst thou take me so awry? I did but speak of days agone, when I was a thoughtless wench, and had never seen thee, Dick."

Dick Busswell penitently kissed his wife's comely cheek, and tried to console her.

"There, there, never mind, go and get supper, while Jack and I fetch in the stuffs, there'll be never another customer to-night, I'll warrant; and then I'll just run up the

street and bid Master Shufflebotham and Barber Tuffit—he'll tell ye all the news a stirring—to come and make a merry night of it. And, Cicely, make us a stew of neatesfoot and tripes, with a sliced onion and sops, savoury as none other in all Windham can; and brew us a bowl of lambs-wool, with just a roasted crab apple, and a sprig of rosemary for a flavour. I'll look out the bran new shovel board of beech wood, for I know you love a game of shove-groat, and a gossip to boot. Marry, we'll have a night of it!"

With which, he bustled off and called the light-handed Jack, leaving his dame, now in high spirits and intent on hospitable cares, to see after the supper.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Jack shall have Jill;
Nought shall go ill."
MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

ON St. Crispin's day Nature in her ruddy autumnal garb looked smilingly over the grey turrets of Thorpe. Within its walls were bustle and ferment; serving men and women running hither and thither in officious haste and flurry, for it was their Mistress's wedding day.

While the morning was yet early, along the country lanes and byways, from outlying hamlets came the retainers of the manor to do honour to their lady. These had stood manfully by her through the season of Ket's success, many

of them losing their chattels, and even being ousted from their homes by his unscrupulous bands. As they arrived in scattered knots, they trooped under the portcullis, which, highdrawn, showed its spiked teeth above them, into the courtyard. The men and lads in their holiday jerkins, the dames and girls in their smartest petticoats, their rosy cheeks rivalling the tints of the posies they carried. There was scarce one of them but had in her hand a sprig of rosemary with some late-blowing flower to mark the festal day. Not a few of the men, though, bore about them signs of the part they had taken at the defence of the Hall; one hopping on a crutch, another with a bandaged arm, or unhealed scar, or perhaps blind of an eye.

Mingled with them, now and again, went a group of yeomen or stately gentlefolks, who had been bidden to the wedding feast.

Then there came the Hethersett people, and at their head, perched up on a pillion behind stout farmer Tucker, our old acquaintance, Jenny Truelove, the housekeeper, her cheeks as plump and her eyes as bright as ever. Following after was a large waggon, which held half a dozen giggling girls, and a like number of guffawing lads, drawn by a team of strong horses. To judge by their pealing laughter they were having a merry time of it, while Jenny was entertaining her cavalier with a long history of her sufferings, and the indignities put on her by Ket.

"He sauced me to my face, Master Tucker," quoth she, "and swore he'd kiss me, but I'd passed my prime. Marry come up! I, who am scarce turned of forty years. Oh! my blood did boil, I'll warrant you. As though, forsooth, my cheeks and lips were for the like of him to wanton with—a

potbellied fellow! I vow I'd ha' scratched his very eyes out, had he put his mottled face towards mine."

"And ha' served him down well right, too, Jenny," replied her beau. "Marry! had I stood in his shoes I'd sooner ha' begged a kiss on my bended knees. What! twit ye on your years! My word, 'twas a great head with but little wit! You're but a pullet yet, Jenny."

Mistress Truelove bridled, and gently slapped him, saying, "Nay then, I doubt you're but giving me a sucket, Dick."

"Never a bit, Jenny. Troth, I'd go a pilgrimage barefoot along the Milky Way to our Lady's shrine of Walsingham, and pray her give me grace with thee, only Master Cromwell's wanton hands have broke her altar down. So I must trust to mine own poor power of suasion."

"In sooth, Dick, I'll own I had rather

pay thee a round score of kisses, than such a fellow should owe me one," said Jenny. "Ah, well! he's got his deserts —his fullblown pride has but brought him to the gallows, and the very crows peck at him now. But 'tis a glorious day for the bridal. I pray St. Germayn send them joy."

"Amen to that! Jenny; and if we, too, don't foot a measure together this day, my name's not Dick Tucker. Halloo! here we be at the gate, and here come Jack Goodeve and Margery along the Downham-road— Well met, gaffer, how dost do? Marry! there's no need to ask how ye be, gammer, your looks speak for ye. Here's a blithe day," and drawing up alongside, the friends exchanged hearty handshakes and congratulations.

The yeoman had jogged over on his bobtailed nag along with his wife in her

fine tawney gown, and a hat decked with ribbons. His honest, sunburnt, face was aglow with pride at Peggy's impending honour, and the prospect of her comfortable settlement. All his wrath and prejudice against Dickson had evaporated since Will had also suffered from Ket's tyranny. He was in a state of much contentment, and had listened without impatience to his wife's ceaseless chatter as they came along, for she was in a flutter of wonderment and expectation as to the day's doings.

The friends passed together into the courtyard to stable their nags, and were speedily occupied in greeting many other acquaintances and kinsfolk.

Within a stone's throw of the Hall walls, and sheltered by a grove of venerable yew trees, nestled a little flint-built church, which bore about it marks of the tastes of successive lords, whose piety, or other

kindred motive, had led them to add to, and embellish it. From the circular Norman tower and arches of the nave —built by Giles Haselwode, the founder of the House, in the time of the second William—to the depressed ogee of the transept windows, done by Sir John Haselwode in the last years of Henry VII., the church was indebted to the lords of the soil. They, indeed, with the silken banners of their achievements rustling overhead, lay about beneath silent marble or brass alongside their dames, at rest from their ambitions and troubles in the house, which they had each helped to perfect.

In a little niche over the porch was the figure of St. Mary, the patron saint of the church, and of the House of Haselwode. Within the porch was the great Bible, chained to an oak reading-board.

The new-born zeal of the Reformers had

caused the church to be dismantled of much of its riches, but the miscellaneous host of the King of the Oak had respected its fabric more than the yeoman's beeves, the burgher's chattels, or the gentlefolks' claret. Yet had the church from its very smallness fared better than many of its great neighbours; moreover, its protector's walls kept off many a zealot, although powerless to stave off requisitions made in the name of King and Council; and while the Abbeys of Creake and Dereham, and the Priories of Bingham and Thelford were dismantled, this little out-of-the-way church had suffered lightly.

Ah! those were, indeed, sad and wild days, when men professed to think—ay, and when each side practised their profession, too, as it got the upperhand—that it was right and good, and to God's honour, to burn and slay their fellows.

For what, forsooth? Because their minds, cast in diverse moulds, could not dovetail about some abstruse dogma, taught by the priests of the old school and combatted by those of the new. True it is, that none who have once tasted power love to lose it, and those who get the upper hand will strive by all means to retain it. It is to be feared, then, that this was at the root of the cruelties, which each party indulged in, as they see-sawed through the reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary, and Elizabeth.

It was in this little church that the people were gathering in readiness for the bride's procession.

She, under the deft hands of Dorothy and her maids, had been tired for the ceremony. Her sweet face had recovered its freshness, in contrast with that morning when, pale and tear stained, she was

decked out for her wedding with the King of the Oak. Surely, never did young English maiden look fairer than she in her gown of sheeny white satin, embroidered with coloured threads; her neck and bosom half concealed by a gold-edged partlet, and her hair tastefully coiled under a headcaul patterned in pearls.

Dorothy Luttrell, having put the last touch to her mistress's toilet, surveyed her with satisfaction.

"Now may St. Faith keep the gay gallants this day, for you're fair enough to turn their heads with mad love, and to make them jealous-sick of good Master Andrew, dear mistress."

"Peace, Dolly!" replied Catherine, "you're a silly flattering goose, and flutter me. In sooth, I be gay as a lark by compare with that doleful day when I first wore

a wedding gown. Ah, me! 'twas a sad time for both of us, wench."

"Nay then, I beseech thee let not that memory dash the bright sunshine of this happy day, which hath dawned so fair for thee; 'twill but fret thee."

"Gramercy! wench, I'll take thy counsel. Come, bring my gloves and nosegay; I'll go down to greet our guests."

On entering the withdrawing room, where the chief company were assembled, Flowerdew came forward with a low bow to receive his bride, and led her forward to accept the gifts and congratulations of the guests.

He made a handsome bridegroom, well matched with the fair bride; and in his doublet of murrey velvet, slashed with canary silk, and hose gartered with claret bands, with his beard well trimmed, the

points of his moustache curled, and his short hair set off by a jewelled hat, few could have recognised the long-locked, unkempt, minstrel who had trolled out his simple ditties in Mousehold Camp, thankful for the crust or odd coin carelessly tossed to him by that motley audience.

When Mistress Catherine had received the presents of her friends, which she did with easy grace, Flowerdew beckoned an attendant, who brought a large tray covered with gloves and scarves of the colours of the two Houses, and then, after the fashion of the times, Catherine presented a scarf to each gentleman, and to each lady a pair of gloves.

Meantime in another chamber of the Hall a humbler bride awaited her call to church. Here stood Peggy Goodeve, rosy and shy, in a gown of gay taffeta, a coverchief on her head, and a posy on her bosom. Holding

her hand, and whispering occasional soft encouragement was Will Dickson—stalwart Will—who in the tight-fitting cloth jerkin and hose, which showed off his muscular limbs, looked no mean or unbecoming bridegroom. Laughter and tears were both struggling for the mastery with Peggy, for the poor little maiden was sadly flustered at the prospect of being led out before the quality. With them were Goodeve and Margery, the latter in high feather, but sorely ruffled by the sight of her child's tears.

"Lack-a-day! was ever such a wench? You're spoiling your gown, and reddening your eyes like a ferret's—a-crying like an April storm. Come! bethink thee what the folks will say, and dry your eyes."

"La! mother," laughed Peggy, "I but cried for joy, as Will knows well."

"Ay, marry, that do I!" replied he, "and will soon chase the tears away," with

which, he drew the maiden towards him and gave her a hearty buss.

His dalliance was interrupted by a merry laugh as old Sir Giles Starling, who had come in behind them, followed suit and cried out,—

"Come, come, Dickson, fair play's a jewel; Peggy will not deny the old Knight a kiss, I'll warrant. By St. George! I've never seen a fairer prospect of the Dunmow flitch, and if either of ye repent through the coming year, asleep or awake, marry! ye may write old Giles Starling down a blind bat."

The tinkling of the church-bells put a stop to the Knight's gossip, and he betook himself off to take his place in the procession, which was just starting, headed by a page in a silk dress carrying the massive silver bridecup filled with wine in which was the gilded branch of rosemary. Then

came the musicians playing a merry march, and after them a band of maidens, some with bride-cakes, others with garlands of wheat, preceding Catherine and Flowerdew, after whom walked the guests. Then came Will and Peggy, hand in hand, attended by a pretty lass with the rosemary branch, and followed by Goodeve and Margery.

Amid the fervent good wishes of the bystanders the procession passed into church, where the priest stood awaiting them, and in solemn tones invoked a blessing on the wedlock, as they knelt before him at the altar step.

When the last chaunted note had died away, and the last secret prayer had been whispered, the silence which had reigned awhile was broken, and the gay procession reformed and returned to the House.

The wedding feast was spread in the

great Hall on long tables ranged down the room, with a cross table raised on a dais, in the centre of which Flowerdew and his bride took their seats, the guests being placed right and left according to their quality.

Will Dickson and his wife had a seat of honour below the salt, near to our old friend Daffrow, who had resumed the duties of seneschal. Many were the flasks of sack and red Burgundy, and many the flagons of home-brewed, quaffed, and loud were the jests and laughter of the guests as the feast proceeded. All went merrily, and gaily as the marriage bells.

At length, when all had done due justice to the cheer, the bride cup, having been first tasted by Catherine herself, was sent round, and each guest, standing up, sipped to the bride's health. Then Flowerdew led the way into the courtyard, where prepara-

tion had been made for the games, and the company soon divided itself into groups, each one joining in his favourite sport.

Some of the lusty yeomen gave their voices for running the quintain—an exercise which enabled them to display their skill and agility before their sweethearts' admiring eyes—so a party was formed, and the jousters having mounted their steeds, couched their alder poles, and began their game with zest.

Many a bold tilter got bowled from his steed amid the jeers of the lookers-on by the thwacks, which the sand-bag at the end of the revolving beam fetched his head and shoulders, when his agility failed to outstrip its evolutions. Among the tilters both Daffrow and plump Master Tucker distinguished themselves, each for a time escaping the fate which befell the others, who one by one succumbed to the smacks

of the bag, till the two were left alone to contend for the prize. But Tucker's weight now told against him, and, being winded by his exercise, he was caught in the next joust by the avenging bag and stretched flat on the ground.

Daffrow was therefore adjudged victor by general acclaim, and poor Dick Tucker sought consolation for his bruised and aching bones in Jenny Truelove's sympathetic company.

In another part of the yard, active rustics were trying their strength of muscle by throwing heavy weights, wrestling, and foot-racing, in which the lasses also joined, and often proved their metal by out pacing their swains.

In the bowling alley the old gaffers collected and played half-bowl, rolling the large wooden balls at the jack with lazy energy. Nor must we forget a group

of lovers of that manly sport, quarterstaff, who, twirling their staves with nimble dexterity, gave and took some ugly thwacks with English pluck.

Some, as they tired of the sports, fell off to join the romping company of lads and lasses disporting themselves at Hoodman blind, Master Hoodman being set blindfold in their midst, while the rest skipped about, thumping him with their kerchiefs and caps as they eluded his grasp. When by chance a girl was caught, she paid forfeit to her captor by a kiss.

After a time, dancing usurped the place of the games and sports. The musicians, perched up on a raised platform, blew with a will their liveliest tune as Flowerdew and his madam in good old English style led off the measure, and afterwards retired, leaving the happy folks to the unrestrained enjoyment of the exercise.

All was mirth and jollity, kept up till twilight dispersed the merrymakers to their homes.

Before they went, they did not fail to give a hearty, and oft-repeated hurrah in honour of their Master and his Bride, who together from the topmost step at the entrance acknowledged the ringing enthusiasm of their friends and dependents, and bowed to them, "Good-night," and to us "Good-bye."

"Honour, riches, marriage blessing,
Long continuance, and increasing,
Hourly joys be still upon you!
Juno sings her blessings on you."

TEMPEST.

THE END.

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